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**Penal Substitution in the Construction of British  
Evangelical Identity: Controversies in the Doctrine  
of the Atonement in the Mid-2000s**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Theology and Religion

Durham University

2011

## **Maxwell Wood**

### **Penal Substitution in the Construction of British Evangelical Identity: Controversies in the Doctrine of the Atonement in the Mid-2000s.**

#### **Abstract**

This thesis examines the controversy surrounding the doctrine of the atonement and penal substitution which occurred within British evangelicalism as a result of the publication of Steve Chalke and Alan Mann's book *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003). The primary focus is upon what this controversy can reveal about the function of the doctrine of the atonement and various atonement models, such as penal substitution, in the ongoing construction of British evangelical identity. The doctrine of the atonement is a key theological concept which accompanies crucicentrism, which is a particular focus upon the death and crucifixion of Jesus as salvific events. Religious collectives utilise various aspects of religion, including theological doctrines, in order to mark their corporate identity and distinguish themselves from other collectives. It will be demonstrated that the doctrine of the atonement has been used throughout history as a core marker in the construction of British evangelical identity.

Penal substitution, as one model of the atonement, has been of particular significance in further defining the collective identity of one particular group within British evangelicalism, namely conservative evangelicals. For other British evangelical groups, penal substitution has been seen as a less significant aspect of their identity. During the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, contestation concerning the validity of penal substitution intensified and took on an increasingly 'intra-evangelical' function; adherence or otherwise to penal substitution contributed to the delineation of boundaries between different types of British evangelicals, particularly between conservative and liberal evangelicals.

An analysis of the controversy which occurred during the mid-2000s confirms that this situation has essentially continued into the twenty-first century. This is in terms of both the content and manner of the contestation. The analysis is based upon a review of a wide range of documentary sources, supplemented by new data obtained from a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with some key individuals involved in the controversy. The conclusion is reached that the doctrine of the atonement remains a salient theological concept used by British evangelicals in the construction of their collective identity. Further, that advocacy or rejection of penal substitution also continues to contribute to the delineation of boundaries between different types of British evangelicals.

## **Declaration**

This thesis is based on research solely undertaken by the author. No part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree at Durham University or at any other university.

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their support and assistance in this research. Firstly, the Right Reverend Richard Hurford, OAM, the people and clergy of the Anglican Diocese of Bathurst, Australia, and the Trustees of the Lucas-Tooth Scholarship. Without their generous support and prayers, this research would never have been possible. My supervisors, Professor Gerard Loughlin and Dr Mathew Guest, for their extensive guidance and encouragement throughout the project. Colleagues at St Chad's College, Durham. In particular, my College Tutor, the Reverend Professor Jeff Astley and the College Principal, the Reverend Canon Dr Joseph Cassidy, for their support and assistance. The interviewees who generously gave up of their time and provided valuable insights into the controversy and contemporary British evangelicalism. Marian Cleary for her outstanding proofreading assistance. The people and clergy of the Parish of St Margaret of Antioch, Durham, for providing one of my spiritual homes. The wonderful friends I have made while living and working in Durham. Other friends and family, old and new. In particular, my mother Patricia Wood and my aunt Margaret Bool, for their love and support. And, my wife, Danielle. *Mon amour et ma gratitude à toi, ma chérie, ne pourraient jamais s'exprimer par des simples mots.*

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## Introduction

At the beginning of 2004 a fierce doctrinal debate broke out among British evangelicals. The controversy concerned a particular model of the Christian doctrine of the atonement, known as penal substitution, and its place in the construction of British evangelical identity. The trigger for this controversy was the publication in December 2003 of *The Lost Message of Jesus*. This is a superficially innocuous book authored by the high-profile English Baptist pastor Steve Chalke and one of his then collaborators, Alan Mann. However, a series of extraordinary events followed its publication. The book itself, and subsequent publications by Steve Chalke (and others aligned with him), were forcefully criticised by a number of key figures within British evangelicalism and *The Lost Message of Jesus* was banned from the bookshop of at least one prominent evangelical conference.<sup>1</sup> Soon thereafter, public meetings were convened in which strongly held positions were vigorously debated. A formal public statement was issued by the Evangelical Alliance (UK) (hereafter EA) which unequivocally condemned the theological position of Steve Chalke. Evangelical event organisers, who had collaborated for well over a decade, decided to part company over the issue and went on to set up rival and competing conferences. Calls were heard in some quarters for Steve Chalke's public expulsion from the EA and even for some form of Salem-like heresy trial to be conducted.

The aim of this thesis is to examine what this doctrinal controversy reveals about the use of the doctrine of the atonement and penal substitution (the issues at the heart of the controversy) in the construction of British evangelical identity. This includes situating this controversy within a historical tradition of contestation within British evangelicalism surrounding the doctrine of the atonement and the different

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<sup>1</sup> *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003) was banned from the bookshop of the 2004 Keswick convention.

atonement models. In so doing, this thesis demonstrates, in terms of both the content of the theological issues which have been contested, and the manner in which such contestation has occurred, that the doctrine of the atonement continues to function as a key external identity marker for British evangelicals which differentiates them from some other expressions of Christianity. Furthermore, subscription (or otherwise) to particular atonement models, in particular penal substitution, also acts as an important intra-evangelical identity marker in that adherence to penal substitution as an atonement model, or criticism of its significance, continues to delineate the boundaries between different types of British evangelicals.

The research undertaken for this thesis can be conceptually located at an intersection between aspects of the three sub-disciplines of systematic theology, sociology of religion and religious history. The doctrine of the atonement (and the various atonement models, such as penal substitution, which provide the presenting subject matter of the controversy and this thesis) relates to the specific field of soteriology within systematic theology. The use of various aspects of religion in the ongoing construction of the identity of a particular religious collective, in this instance within British evangelicalism, ties in with debates about collective identity construction within sociology of religion. Finally, as will be elaborated further, the utility of narrative in conceptualising the process of religious collective-identity construction requires an awareness of the historical role and function of the relevant identity marker within the history of the religious collective being examined.

## **A Brief Outline of the Thesis**

Chapter 1 will examine what is meant by the concepts of ‘identity’ and ‘identity markers’ as they apply to religious collectives and the processes which relate to the construction of collective identity. The usefulness of Nancy Ammerman’s (2003) approach of conceiving of identity as a narrative construction will be considered. As a prelude to further discussions, an explanation will be provided of what is meant by, and who is being referred to, when references are made to British evangelicals and evangelicalism. David Bebbington’s (1989) influential quadrilateral of British evangelical priorities – conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism – has provided the starting point for the contributions of many scholars. This material will be critically analysed in order to identify some of the key theological beliefs and doctrines British evangelicals have used in the construction of their collective religious identity.

Chapter 2 will examine the Christian doctrine of the atonement and the various models of the atonement, such as penal substitution, *Christus Victor* and subjective moral influence, which have been developed over time (Aulén 1931: 2). In a broad sense, atonement can be understood as being synonymous with reconciliation (Olson 2005: 149; Baillie 1961: 187) and refers to humans becoming ‘one’ with God in the sense of a right relationship (Hick 2008: 96). In a narrower sense, however, atonement focuses specifically upon the salvific characteristics of Jesus’ crucifixion and death (Hick 2008: 96; Morris 1983: 5 and 13). Furthermore, a penal substitutionary understanding of the atonement entails two basic elements of belief (Packer 1974: 17). Firstly, that Jesus’ death was substitutionary, or vicarious, meaning that one person was acting in the place of another (17). Secondly, there is the belief which functions as an anchor or qualifier, that Jesus’ substitutionary death was ‘penal’. This terminology

has strong juridical overtones and is concerned with notions of law and retributive justice (25). It also presupposes that, as a result of human sin, there is a penalty (*poena*) to be imposed upon sinful humanity by God as the righteous judge (29).

Chapter 3 delves more specifically into the history of the doctrine of the atonement, and atonement models, such as penal substitution, and their role within British evangelicalism from the eighteenth century onward. It will be demonstrated that historically, crucicentrism and the doctrine of the atonement have been used as an important marker in the construction of British evangelical identity since that period. Furthermore, penal substitution has been, since the middle of the nineteenth century, especially significant in further defining an important aspect of the collective identity of one group within British evangelicalism, namely conservative evangelicals. For other groups of British evangelicals, penal substitution can be seen to be less central to their understanding of the atonement. This resulted in the situation that since the middle of the nineteenth century penal substitution has been contested at various times among British evangelicals. The contestation surrounding penal substitution intensified during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. From this point, penal substitution can therefore be regarded as having performed an increasingly ‘intra-evangelical’ function in the sense that adherence to it, or criticism of it, contributed to the further delineation of boundaries between different types of British evangelicals. In particular, attitudes towards penal substitution had come to mark an increasingly important distinction between conservative and liberal British evangelicals during the first half of the twentieth century.

Chapters 4 and 5 will specifically focus upon the doctrinal controversy which flared up among British evangelicals during the mid-2000s.<sup>2</sup> The first section of Chapter 4 provides a general presentation of the main events from 2003 onwards, the publications which provoked and perpetuated the controversy and the parts played by key protagonists in the debate. The second part of Chapter 4 offers a critical analysis of some of the key theological arguments which were put forward during the controversy. Chapter 5 will then consider some of the motivations and strategies employed by the main protagonists.

The data analysed in these chapters originates from two main sources. Firstly, a wide range of documentary sources that were produced during the controversy have been examined. Secondly, a significant amount of new and original data was obtained from a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with a number of the key individuals involved in the controversy in the mid-2000s. Interviewees included Steve Chalke, Alan Mann, Mike Ovey, Tom Wright, and a number of the senior leaders within the EA at the time of the controversy, such as Derek Tidball and David Hilborn. Information about the interviews, short biographies of the interviewees and a general discussion of the methodology adopted to obtain and analyse this research data is set out in the Appendices to this thesis.

The analysis of the data relating to the controversy that occurred during the mid-2000s presented in Chapters 4 and 5 will support a number of further conclusions. Firstly, the content of the theological issues which were being contested in the most recent controversy surrounding the doctrine of the atonement and penal substitution, and the manner in which such contestation was conducted, confirm that both the

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'mid-2000s' is used in this thesis as a shorthand way of referring to the middle years of the first decade of the twenty-first century which is the period during which the controversy that is the main focus of this thesis took place.

doctrine of the atonement, and atonement models such as penal substitution, continue to be significant for British evangelical identity into the twenty-first century. In particular, the doctrine of the atonement remains an important theological concept used by British evangelicals in the construction of their collective identity. Furthermore, support for, or rejection of, penal substitution as being central to such identity continues to contribute to the delineation of boundaries between different types of British evangelicals, in particular between conservative and some non-conservative sections within British evangelicalism who wish to label themselves as open evangelicals. The General Conclusion identifies some potential areas for further research and examination which have emerged during the course of the research project.



# **Chapter 1 – Identity Markers and British Evangelical Identity**

This chapter will firstly introduce some of the contributions which sociologists of religion have made towards a better understanding of how religious collectives utilise various ‘aspects of religion’ to construct their identities. By examining the work of Nancy Ammerman (2003), consideration will be given to how narrative analysis provides a useful approach to understanding ongoing identity-formation processes in the contemporary cultural context. In the second part of the chapter, what is meant by British evangelicalism is explored by reviewing and commenting upon Roger Olson’s (2005) usage structure. Finally, some of the key theological beliefs and doctrines historically utilised by British evangelicals in the construction of their collective religious identity will be outlined. To assist in this regard, David Bebbington’s (1989) influential fourfold schema, or quadrilateral, of the primary historical features of British evangelicalism – conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism – along with some of the subsequent developments and critiques of his approach, will inform the analysis.

## **1.1 Religious Collective Identity**

### **1.1.1 Identity, Culture and the Utilisation of Aspects of Religion in Religious Collective Identity Formation**

In this thesis, when reference is made to the term ‘identity’ this is essentially referring to the answers individuals and groups provide to the questions, ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Who are we?’ (Olson 1993: 33). As Karen Cerulo (1997) has further noted, the notion of ‘collective identity’

is a concept grounded in classic sociological constructs: Durkheim's 'collective conscience,' Marx's 'class consciousness,' Weber's *Verstehen* [interpretive understanding], and Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft* [community]. So rooted, the notion addresses the 'we-ness' of a group, stressing the similarities or shared attributes around which group members coalesce. (386)

Identity in this sense, whether collective or individual, can be distinguished from 'culture' on the basis of 'explicit recognition and intentional ownership' (Richter 2004: 173). By contrast, culture is more implicit: 'people may share a culture and not recognize elements in it; but they will name portions and elements of a common identity' (Weeks 1993: 309). Philip Richter (2004) has similarly noted that in contrast to identity 'individuals do not necessarily have to feel, or even be able to articulate, cultural codes' (173).

'Identity markers' are distinctive characteristics or features that compose and reflect the identity of an individual or group. Religious collectives, such as churches, sects, cults and denominations,<sup>3</sup> utilise various attributes or aspects of religion to construct and mark their corporate identities. This is a process which takes on particular significance and complexity in pluralistic societal contexts where there is a coexistence of competing religions, religious groups and worldviews and thus a need for religious collectives to differentiate themselves from one another (McGuire 1992: 38; Ammerman 2003: 211; Carroll and Roof 1993: 21). The significance and complexity of, and possible challenges posed by, such a process is likely to continue due to the increasing flows of information provided by new technologies accompanying the phenomena of globalisation (Hunter and Yates 2002: 343-344;

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<sup>3</sup> Proper definitions and distinctions between various types of religious collectives have been key themes in the study of the history of the sociology of religion (Furseth and Repstad 2006: 133). For a detailed discussion of the contributions made by noted scholars in this area regarding the different types of religious collectives (such as Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, H. Richard Niebuhr and Howard Becker) see McGuire (1992: 133-142) and also Furseth and Repstad (2006: 133-136).

Coleman 2000: 4-5).<sup>4</sup> In such contexts, the utilisation of various aspects of a religion serves to establish both an awareness of the existence of a particular religious collective and to highlight the differences between religious collectives.

The individual aspects of religion which have traditionally been used by religious collectives to define, distinguish and mark their identity include: formal beliefs and doctrines; ethical standards; forms of governance; ritual and symbolic expressions; and religious experiences (McGuire 1992: 15-20; Olson 1993: 38). In addition, factors such as ancestry, origin, language and ethnicity have also been observed as forming important aspects of religious collective identity (Dashefsky *et al.* 2003: 260; Ebaugh 2003: 230). In this way different religious collectives will assert, combine, emphasise and give priority to different aspects of religion in order to construct and mark their distinctive religious identity (Olson 1993: 38). In a discussion regarding North American evangelicalism, for example, James Hunter (1987) has suggested that:

Evangelicalism shares with the larger Protestant phenomenon a fixation with theology. Yet its concern is far more intense. Not only do Evangelicals distinguish themselves from other religions this way, but they distinguish themselves from liberal Protestantism this way as well. Orthodoxy, strictly speaking, is a theological matter, not a moral or ritual matter as it is for some other faiths. (19)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> There are nonetheless some scholars who question the assumption that factors such as increased societal pluralism and new information technologies will necessarily create challenges for religious collectives in their processes of identity construction. Daniel Olson (1993), for example, posits that factors such as urbanisation, improved transportation and improved communication dramatically increase the choice of affiliations and associations available to people (35). Olson maintains that people will exercise this increased choice to develop subcultures and communities 'whose members share a common identity more than a particular location' (36). Thus he concludes that 'the growth of religious subcultures facilitates interaction among persons who share a religious identity and shields many from significant exposure to religious pluralism' (35). James Beckford (2003) has also stressed that the 'self-reflexivity' of religious collectives is not just the product 'of external forces. Instead such collectives [...] are also agents, observers and critics of their own development.' Beckford concludes that 'religion is far too subtle and complex to fit easily into simplistic scenarios of globalisation' (105).

<sup>5</sup> Olson (1993) also maintains that among many Protestant groups in the United States 'beliefs and values (orthodoxy) are especially important for defining religious identity' (38). Christopher Soper (1994) has similarly noted that among North American and British evangelicals: 'Specific evangelical

Meredith McGuire (1992) furthermore concludes that in contrast with more ‘popular or folk religion and other nonofficial religious elements’ (95), official church-oriented religion comprises

a set of beliefs and practices prescribed, regulated, and socialized by organized, specifically religious groups. These groups set norms of belief and action for their members, and they establish an official model of what it means to be ‘one of us’. (99)

As will become evident though from the subsequent discussion central to this thesis, such conceptualisations of religious collective identity formation must not neglect the role of history and conceptual inheritance regarding which aspects of religion for a particular collective are assumed to be dispensable and which aspects are held to be immutable.

### **1.1.2 Approaches to Understanding Identity Formation**

In an examination of religious identities and institutions, Nancy Ammerman (2003) is critical of what she perceives as the polarisation within post-WWII sociological scholarship which conceives of identity formation in terms of either ‘order/continuity’ or ‘chaos/revision’ (Ammerman 2003: 211). Ammerman explains her basic criticism in this respect thus

the tension between order and chaos, between continuity and revision, is reflected in differing emphases in thinking about identity. Some [chaos/revision advocates] focus on fluidity and agency, on ways in which

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religious beliefs and cultural values [...] have all helped to promote group formation. Group leaders have self-consciously referred to these and other shared values in promoting evangelical group formation. Believers have joined organizations because they share religious beliefs and the cultural values which reinforce them’ (36).

each new encounter leaves the world or the identity slightly (or radically) changed. Others [order/continuity advocates], following especially in the footsteps of Bourdieu, [...] focus on the ways in which every interaction is structured and reinforces patterns of difference, hierarchy, and domination, especially through categories of class, race, and gender [...]. (211)

Karen Cerulo (1997) similarly identifies this polaristic tendency, referring to the two positions as the ‘constructionists’ (Ammerman’s ‘order/continuity’) and the ‘postmodernists’ (Ammerman’s ‘chaos/revision’) (Cerulo 1997: 387-393). Cerulo maintains that from the constructionist perspective ‘every collective becomes a social artefact – an entity moulded, refabricated, and mobilized in accord with reigning cultural scripts and centres of power.’ In contrast, the postmodernist position stresses ‘the problems inherent in collective categorization, presenting a postmodern challenge to arguments of unified group experiences’ (387).

An illustrative example of the ‘order/continuity’ or ‘constructionist’ approach to identity formation can be found in the work of Stuart Hall (1996) who argues that somewhat stable identities

are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power [...]. (4)

Hall further explains that:

Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. [...] They are the result of a successful articulation or ‘chaining’ of the subject into the flow of the discourse [...]. (6)

In some important respects, Hall's position is consistent with David Swartz's (1997) interpretation of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of '*habitus*' (103). Swartz proceeds to explain *habitus* in the following terms:

Habitus tends to shape individual action so that existing opportunity structures are perpetuated. Chances of success or failure are internalized and then transformed into individual aspirations or expectations; these are in turn externalized in action that tends to reproduce the objective structure of life chances [...]. Thus, Bourdieu observes that aspirations and practices of individuals and groups tend to correspond to the formative conditions of their respective habitus. (103)<sup>6</sup>

An example of the alternate 'chaos/revision' or 'postmodernist' approach to identity formation can be found in the work of Zygmunt Bauman (1996). Bauman is critical of the 'order/continuity' position for conceiving of individual identity creators as being analogous to 'pilgrims' on a somewhat predetermined trajectory (23). Such pilgrims are understood (by order/continuity advocates) to be proceeding along a worldly life journey with each event being the result of a previous event and influencing a subsequent future event heading towards a fulfilment (23). Such a world inhabited by pilgrim identity holders 'must be orderly, determined, predictable, ensured' (23). Bauman argues that such a world view which emphasises order, predictability and continuation does not reflect the reality of postmodernity:

In the life-game of the postmodern consumers the rules of the game keep changing in the course of playing. The sensible strategy is therefore to keep each game short – so that a sensibly played game of life calls for the splitting of one big all-embracing game with huge stakes into a series of brief and

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Jenkins (1992) further discusses Bourdieu's notion of habitus as follows: 'the habitus *disposes* actors to do certain things [...] habitus is acquired by individuals through experience and explicit socialisation in early life [...]. The habitus as a shared body of dispositions, classificatory categories and generative schemes is, if it is nothing else, the outcome of collective history. [...] Bourdieu is arguing that the objective world in which groups exist, and the objective environment – other people and things – as experienced from the point of view of individual members of the group, is the product of the past practices of this generation and previous generations [...] history tends to repeat itself and the *status quo* is perpetuated. This process of cultural and social reproduction is responsible for the apparent 'continuity and regularity' of social structure' (78-81).

narrow games with small ones [...]. In short, to cut the present off at both ends, to sever the present from history, to abolish time in any other form but a flat collection or an arbitrary sequence of present moments; a *continuous present* [...]. The overall result is the *fragmentation* of time into *episodes*, each one cut off from its past and from its future, each one self-enclosed and self-contained. Time is no longer a river, but a collection of ponds and pools. (24-25)

Bauman maintains that, in contrast to modernity's conception of pilgrim identity creators, within the postmodern context there are more accurately conceived as competing coexisting 'identity recyclers'. Such identity recyclers are properly understood as being analogous to 'strollers', 'vagabonds', 'tourists' and 'players' (26-32). Bauman suggests that in the context of postmodernity

the real problem is not how to build identity, but to preserve it [...]. The meaning of identity, points out Christopher Lasch, 'refers to both persons and to things. Both have lost their solidity in modern society, their definiteness and continuity.' The world constructed of durable objects has been replaced 'with disposable products designed for immediate obsolescence.' In such a world, 'identities can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume.' The horror of the new situation is that all diligent work of construction may prove to be in vain; its allurements are the fact of not being bound by past trials, being never irrevocably defeated [...]. (23-24)

James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium (2000) similarly describe the perspective of this chaos/revision approach to understanding identity formation as promoting the view that:

Coherence and constancy, it seems, don't amount to much any more in a postmodern world [...]. In such a world, the self is everywhere and thus nowhere in particular – fleeting, evanescent, a mere shadow of what it used to be. Once viewed as a central presence in social life, the self, we are now told, is arbitrarily 'up for grabs', an 'anything goes' entity, if not an insidious 'con game' [...]. (3)

Ammerman (2003) argues that neither of these general approaches, 'order/continuity' or 'chaos/revision', is adequate if held in isolation from the other.

Ammerman explains that she is

unwilling to discard the possibility that persons seek some sense of congruence within the complexity of their lives. Nor do I believe that structured categories exist untouched by the actions and resistance of the actors who inhabit them [...]. What we need is a way to talk about who we are and how we behave without reducing ourselves either to a single determining structural essence or to complete chaotic indeterminacy [...]. Both the coherence and the revision are central to the process. (211)

The solution Ammerman puts forward is effectively a *via media* approach to understanding identity formation, one which embraces necessary elements of the two polar positions.<sup>7</sup> Her *via media* approach conceives of 'identity as a narrative construction' (213). By utilising the work of Margaret Somers (1994), Ammerman argues that narrative analysis provides a method which is necessarily dynamic and responsive to the demands of 'understand[ing] the nature of identity in a complex world that involves multiple solidarities which both constrain and are constantly reconstructed' (213).<sup>8</sup> Ammerman asserts that the utility of such an approach is that:

Narrative takes an event and makes it part of a plot, that is, an action-account. The event cannot do this for itself, but must be 'emplotted' by the actors who must evaluate the various possible scenarios available to them. (213)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A similar call for a synthesis of traditional approaches is advocated by Cerulo (1997: 400ff).

<sup>8</sup> For an example of the application of narrative analysis to the study of the identity of a particular religious collective see Peter Collins's (2004) study of a Quaker congregation in northern England.

<sup>9</sup> There is a strong correlation between Ammerman's position and Simon Coleman's (2000) use of the concept of 'narrative emplacement' (118-119). Applying this concept of narrative emplacement to a study of a Swedish Pentecostal and charismatic groups, Coleman outlines that narrative emplacement refers 'to the production of *self-descriptions*, in personal or collective contexts, that locate identity in terms of a landscape of evangelical actions, ideals and characters' (Coleman 2000: 118).



Somers (1994) similarly outlines her conviction that recent scholarship confirms that

stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that 'experience' is constructed through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives; and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public and cultural narratives. (614)<sup>10</sup>

Ammerman further maintains that narrative analysis locates an understanding of identity within the 'socially structured areas of interaction present in everyday life' (215). These areas are at one and the same time 'structured' and 'constructed'. They are structured in the sense that existing power actors inhabit and erect templates within which individuals and groups act and form identities. However they are also constructed in the sense that individuals and groups continually revise and reconceptualise identities within these templates. Further, Ammerman believes that this approach highlights the fact that there is an '*intersectionality* of the situations out of which identities are constructed' (215). There are multiple intersecting public narratives concurrently operative and available to individuals and groups in the identity formation process (215-216). In this way, when applying this approach to an understanding of religious collectives and their identity narratives, Ammerman maintains that religious collectives

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<sup>10</sup> Holstein and Gubrium (2000) similarly maintain that, 'Narrators artfully pick and choose from what is experientially available to articulate their lives and experiences. Yet, as they actively craft and inventively construct their narratives, they also draw from what is culturally available, storying their lives in recognizable ways. Narratives of the self don't simply rest within us to motivate and guide our actions, nor do they lurk behind our backs as social templates to stamp us into selves according to the leading stories of the day' (103).

are suppliers of ‘public narratives’, accounts that express the history and purposes of a cultural or institutional entity [...]. These organizations create widespread social arenas in which religious action can occur, and they supply structured religious biographical narratives – the saved sinner, the pilgrim [...]. Religious organizations establish such narratives through elaborate sets of roles, myths, rituals, and behavioural prescriptions that encourage participants to perceive Sacred Others as their coparticipants in life. (217)<sup>11</sup>

A similar conclusion is reached by Jackson Carroll and Wade Clark Roof (1993) in their consideration of the identity of religious collectives, particularly denominations.

Carroll and Roof argue that the communal identity of such religious collectives

is rooted in a cultural narrative, or set of meanings, shaped by historical and social experience. Memory draws upon values, symbols, and traditions that reach far into the past, but always it is a memory of a particular group as it understands its own history and experience in a present moment. Cultural narratives are influenced in content and style, especially in voluntary religious order, by a variety of inputs, some distinctly religious in the sense of doctrine or theology, others peculiar to group experience – as related to social class, race, ethnicity, nationalism, regionalism, or the like. (16-17)<sup>12</sup>

However, these identity-narratives made available by religious collectives are not immutable. As Ammerman cautions, notwithstanding the ability of religious collectives to create and promote powerful identity narratives, ‘the intersectionality of identities and the permeability of modern institutional boundaries guarantees that these narratives will not remain singular or untouched’ (Ammerman 2003: 218). This caution is similarly echoed by Carroll and Roof (1993) who maintain that within religious collectives:

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<sup>11</sup> Somers (1994) argues that there are four types of narratives operative in identity construction: ‘ontological narratives’ used by social actors to act and make sense of their lives; ‘public narratives’ of institutional and cultural formations (including religious collectives); ‘metanarratives’ into which contemporary actors in history are embedded; and ‘conceptual narratives’ which are explanations and concepts constructed by social researchers (617-620).

<sup>12</sup> James Hopewell (1987) maintains that for congregations, narrative serves three primary functions: ‘1. The congregation’s self-perception is primarily in narrative form. 2. The congregation’s communication among its members is primarily by story. 3. By its own congregating, the congregation participates in narrative structures of the world’s societies’ (46).

Even [their] narratives – the fundamental stories about life – undergo change. The stories as expressed in common worship, in public witness, in everyday lives, all change as leaders and participants adapt to new challenges and circumstances. (17)

Further, it is not simply a change in identity narratives themselves which can be observed within such groups, but disputes will also arise concerning the nature of the narratives which have been received. Members of religious collectives will often contest the nature and content of their received identity narratives. Even if some agreement can subsequently be reached concerning the nature of received narrative, further dispute can arise concerning how such received narrative should be interpreted (Linde 1993: 105). Alasdair MacIntyre (1989) has even gone as far as to suggest that

what constitutes a tradition is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition, a conflict which itself has a history susceptible of rival interpretations [...]. A tradition then not only embodies the narrative of an argument, but it is only to be recovered by an argumentative retelling of that narrative which will itself be in conflict with other argumentative retellings. (146)

In this regard, this thesis will explore the process through which aspects of group identities are defined and re-defined over time. It will demonstrate that a key theological doctrine and its accompanying narrative which has been used by British evangelicals in the construction of their identity, namely the doctrine of the atonement and atonement models such as penal substitution, have been consistently contested. Further, it will show that the place and use of these doctrines continues to be subjected to change, revision and ‘retelling’, due to pressures exerted by contemporary societal and theological contexts.

## 1.2 British Evangelical Identity

In the preceding section the concepts of identity and identity markers were defined and the section explored how they can be utilised by religious collectives to construct and mark their identities. The next section will introduce the specific religious collective which is the focus of this thesis and explore a number of the key theological beliefs and doctrines used historically by British evangelicals in the construction of their collective religious identity.

### 1.2.1 Defining Evangelicalism – Different Usages of the Term

Etymologically, the English word ‘evangel’ is an anglicisation of the Greek word *evangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον) meaning ‘good news’ or ‘gospel’ (Larsen 2007: 3; Jensen 2008: para 2; Frame 2007: para 5; Vanhoozer 2007: 17).<sup>13</sup> An example of the use of the word in the New Testament can be found in Romans 1:16 where Paul writes, ‘For I am not ashamed of the gospel [εὐαγγέλιον]; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek’.<sup>14</sup> In English, the word evangelical can be used as a noun or an adjective. Phillip Jensen (2008) suggests that as a noun, evangelical simply ‘refer[s] to somebody who believes the gospel and bases his/her life on it’ (para 11). As an adjective, evangelical is used ‘to describe an activity, organisation or person that accepts and promotes the gospel’ (para 12). In the interview conducted with the Anglican evangelical vicar, Jonathan Fletcher, he affirmed the view that his ‘evangelicalism’ comes before any denominational allegiance:

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<sup>13</sup> All references are to page numbers unless otherwise specified such as in this instance ‘para’ which refers to the paragraph number in an online resource.

<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised Edition)*.

I was converted as a twelve year old and therefore if you were converted you have to be an evangelical. And then I had to decide what sort of evangelical to be? Was I going to be a Methodist evangelical or a Baptist evangelical or a Presbyterian evangelical? [...] I became an Anglican evangelical [...] an evangelical noun comes first, [the] Anglican adjective is secondary. So I have more in common with evangelicals from other denominations than with Anglicans who are not evangelicals.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond its primary etymological meaning, Roger Olson (2005) proceeds to identify a number of further uses of the term evangelical. Historically, in certain parts of Western Europe which were influenced by Protestant state churches that promoted the sixteenth-century reforming teachings of figures such as Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-64) and Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), ‘evangelical’ is a term synonymous with ‘Protestant’ (Olson 2005: 4; Larsen 2007: 2; Bebbington 1989: 1; Dayton 1977: 73). This is particularly notable in sections of eastern France, Germany and Switzerland. Phillip Jensen (2008) notes that in this sense, the evangelical movement was a Protestant movement – ‘it accepted the great reformation truths such as the authority of the Bible, the finished work of Christ in his sacrificial death for sin and justification by faith alone’ (para 17).

Evangelical is though also used in a specifically Anglican sense to refer to the faction or party within Anglican churches, for example the Church of England and the Anglican Church of Australia, who oppose the reintroduction of what they regard as pre-Reformation Romish practices.<sup>16</sup> Anglican evangelicals have promoted the teachings and practices of the first generation of English reformers of the mid-sixteenth

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<sup>15</sup> For information regarding the interviews which were conducted as part of the research for this thesis see Appendices 1-5. Quotations extracted from interview transcripts have no page reference.

<sup>16</sup> For example the use of certain liturgical vestments in the Liturgy of the Lord’s Supper (also known as Holy Communion or the Eucharist) such as the chasuble, certain liturgical postures and movements such as genuflecting towards the consecrated elements and elevating the consecrated elements, and certain liturgies such as Solemn Benediction.

century, such as Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) (Olson 2005: 4). Commenting on this particular usage of the term Phillip Jensen (2008) argues:

The Anglo-Catholics (commonly called the High Church) were a nineteenth-century movement. They tried to take the Anglican Church out of Protestantism and back into pre-Reformation days and practices. They emphasised the priesthood, rituals and a Roman Catholic understanding of the sacraments. This was their evangel – their gospel – but it was in opposition to the Evangelicals. (para 24)

Olson also argues that another distinct use of the term evangelical can be located in the revivalist and Pietist initiatives which sought to reform and revive Protestant Christianity in places such as Britain, Germany and North America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Olson 2005: 4; Bebbington 1989: 1; Larsen 2007: 1; Treier 2007: 36; Van Dyk 2007: 126; George 2007: 277; Dayton 1977: 73). Commenting on this usage, Olson observes that:

In Germany this movement of ‘heart Christianity’ that came to be known as Pietism emphasized the necessity of personal conversion to Jesus Christ through repentance and faith, a life of devotion [...] and holiness of life [...]. Lutheran leaders such as Philip Spener and August Francke firmly established a spiritual renewal movement within the state church; Count von Zinzendorf turned a small band of wandering spiritual Christians known as the Moravian Brethren into an influential renewal movement [...]. In Great Britain and the American colonies a revival known as the Great Awakening broke out under the leadership of John and Charles Wesley, their friend George Whitefield, and Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards. Those who embraced these ‘new measures’ of Christianity that tended toward emotion and appeal for personal decision for Christ called themselves evangelicals. (4)<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In terms of the Church of England, Tom Frame (2007) argues, ‘The “Evangelical Movement” that gathered momentum in the Church of England from the 1740s marked a return to a Scriptural understanding of sanctification and a renewed sense of urgency in the conduct of mission and in the provision of spiritual care. The Movement’s leaders were prompted by disgust at the worldliness and nominalism that was evident among the clergy and their despair at the general disinterest of the laity in pursuing personal holiness [...]. The Christian message needed, the early Evangelicals insisted, to speak to the heart as well as to renew the mind. Among the renowned Evangelical preachers of this period, Charles Simeon (1759-1836) and Henry Venn (1796-1873) proclaimed a strong message of repentance and salvation’ (para 5).

In North America, a further use of the term evangelical arose during the middle of the twentieth century. In this instance the label was used by ‘new evangelicals’ (Olson employs the term ‘postfundamentalist evangelicals’) who sought to distance and distinguish themselves from the increasingly militant ‘separatist fundamentalists’ (Olson 2005: 5; Harris 2008: 39).<sup>18</sup> Harriet Harris (2008) maintains that:

The new evangelicals did not see themselves as betraying a fundamentalist theology but as reversing the withdrawal with intellectual engagement and social responsibility. [...] A significant factor in the widening gap between fundamentalists and new evangelicals was [Billy] Graham’s decision to co-operate with liberals and Roman Catholics in the work of evangelism’.  
(40)<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The distinction was exemplified, for example, by the founding of the separatist fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches in 1941 and the new evangelical National Association of Evangelicals in 1942 (Harris 2008: 39). Harris (2008) has maintained that the term fundamentalist can be employed in three ways. Firstly, it can refer to a particular mentality which entails a number of attitudes including: the proposition that there is no error in scripture as a result of its divine inspiration; adherence to the almost contrary position of seeking to empirically demonstrate the divine inspiration of scripture as a result of its inerrancy; and the view that movement away from either of these positions is a concession to modern scholarship which in turn will weaken the authority of scripture (313). Secondly, in an historical sense, the fundamentalists were a complex coalition of Protestant Christians in North America during the 1920s who fought against modernists and liberalism within their denominations and against the teaching of Darwinism and evolution in schools (29ff). The latter characteristic was exemplified in the 1925 Scopes evolution trial (Harris 2008; Olson 2005: 5; Sheppard 1977: 83). In this trial a high school science teacher named John Scopes was prosecuted by the state of Tennessee and convicted of violating a recently enacted statute (commonly known as ‘the Butler law’) which prohibited the teaching of evolution in public (state) schools (Moran 2002: iv and 216). As will be discussed later, J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), for example, was typical of this fundamentalist evangelicalism. Thirdly, Harris employs the term fundamentalist in the context of the ‘separatist fundamentalist’ groups referred to above (Harris 2008: 17). While David Bebbington (1989: 275) has noted that British evangelicals have generally repudiated application of the term ‘fundamentalist’ to themselves (although it has regularly been employed against British evangelicals and intra-evangelical groups in a pejorative sense – Packer [1958] 1996: 30-1; Bebbington 2009b: 12-13), Harris, for example, has argued that British evangelicals can be legitimately termed fundamentalist when they display the ‘fundamentalist mentality’ with respect to scripture discussed above (2008: 54-6).

<sup>19</sup> William Franklin (Billy) Graham (b. 1918) is an American evangelist who, after completing his studies at Wheaton College, founded the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in 1950 (Olson 2005: 116). Olson (2005) maintains that, ‘Hardly anyone would dispute the claim that Billy Graham was the single most influential person in the post-World War II postfundamentalist evangelical movement and coalition [in the USA] [...]. He is best known as a world evangelist, mission trainer and organizer, ecumenist, founder and funder of Christian organizations, energetic motivator of Christians, and informal chaplain to presidents’ (115-116). Graham conducted crusades in Great Britain in 1954-5, 1966-7, 1984-5 and 1990. It is claimed that during his ministry he has preached to ‘over 210 million people in more than 185 countries and territories’ (Wong 2004: para 10).

Olson notes that the term evangelical is also used in a popular non-scholarly sense (particularly in the media) to refer to any individual or group displaying conduct deemed particularly 'enthusiastic, aggressive, fanatical, or even missionary minded' (Olson 2005: 6). For this reason, some journalists will attach the term evangelical to a whole range of religious collectives – Roman Catholic missionaries, Muslim groups and Jehovah's Witnesses – if they engage in what are deemed to be aggressive missionary initiatives.

An additional usage which Olson does not mention in his discussion, but which has generated some interest since the mid-1990s, is the notion of the 'post-evangelical'. In his book *The Post-Evangelical*, self-described post-evangelical, Dave Tomlinson (1995) locates the origins of this usage in the disenchantment he maintains that he, and similar-minded people, have experienced with 'traditional' expressions of evangelicalism:

Most of those who contemplate the possibility of being 'post'-evangelical do so because of a difficulty they find in reconciling what they see and experience in evangelicalism with their personal values, instinctive reactions and theological reflections. [...] [They experience] the feeling that evangelicalism is supremely good at introducing people to faith in Christ, but distinctively unhelpful when it comes to the matter of progressing into a more 'grown up' experience of faith. (2-3).

One of the primary origins of the dissatisfaction Tomlinson identifies is the sense that much evangelicalism is wedded to outmoded cultural assumptions associated with modernity

post-evangelicals are influenced by a different culture from the one which helped shape present-day evangelicalism. [...] [D]uring the twentieth century evangelicalism has had to situate itself in the world of modernity, and has had to experience and express its faith [...] in the cultural environment of modernity. Post-evangelicals, on the other hand, are people who relate more naturally to the world of postmodernity, and consequently this is the cultural environment which influences the way they think about and experience faith [...]. (8-9).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Tomlinson's work has been the subject of strong criticism, particularly with regards to his conceptions of both the nature of evangelicalism and postmodernity - see for example Hilborn (1997: 96ff). Brian McLaren (2003) reached a similar conclusion to Tomlinson when commenting on a series of accounts



While Tomlinson seeks to distinguish post-evangelicals from ‘ex-evangelicals’ (i.e. people who have ceased to be evangelicals) (7), he does note that post-evangelicals are people who, as a result of their dissatisfaction, possess

the desire to interact on a more positive level with theologies and perspectives which do not come from an evangelical source. The feeling people have is that such [non-evangelical] perspectives are only ever mentioned in evangelical circles in order to be promptly dismissed as rubbish or as a disgraceful compromise. (3)<sup>21</sup>

One final observation which will be made in this section concerns a brief explanation of what is meant by the distinction which is often drawn between ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ evangelicals. Liberal evangelicals are evangelicals who, while locating their conception of the Christian faith within the broad evangelical tradition, conceived of themselves as being less rigidly bound by tradition and more receptive of modern ideas, thinking and methodologies (Johnston 2001: 682; Tidball 1994: 100; Astley 2010: 16). Concerning some aspects commonly associated with broader notions of liberal theology, liberal evangelicalism promoted the view that:

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associated with the so-called ‘emerging churches movement’. McLaren suggested that: ‘these stories reflect a shared discontent with modern evangelicalism. However you want to define the postmodern condition (incredulity towards metanarratives, discontentment with modern civilization, becoming enlightened about the Enlightenment, etc.), it’s clear that to be postmodern means to feel that modern culture is (to some degree) on the wrong track, including modern Christianity’ (223). McLaren and the emerging churches movement has also been the subject of significant criticism. Conservative North American evangelical theologian D.A. Carson (2005), for example, concluded that: ‘If emerging church leaders [such as Brian McLaren] wish to become a long-term prophetic voice that produces enduring fruit and that does not drift off toward progressive sectarianism and even, in the worst instances, outright heresy, they must listen at least carefully to criticisms of their movement [...]. They need to take great pains not to distort history and theology alike, by caricaturing their opponents and not playing manipulative games. And above all, they need to embrace all the categories of the Scriptures, with Scriptures’ balance and cohesion [...].’ (234)

<sup>21</sup> In his interview, Stuart Murray Williams expressed the view that in the context of this recent dissatisfaction among sections of British and North American evangelicalism, which is exemplified by post-evangelicalism and the emerging churches movement, it has resulted in a trend of: ‘a significant number of younger evangelicals [...] reading more widely [and] quite deliberately looking for resources and [they] will be very open to questioning some of the “givens”, including penal substitution.’ McLaren (2010) also named penal substitutionary atonement as one of the ideas he has had to ‘unlearn’ from a suite of beliefs associated with the type of Protestant theology he has been moving away from (138).

Where traditional ways of interpreting Scripture, or traditional beliefs, [have] seemed to be compromised by developments in human knowledge, it was imperative that they should be discarded or reinterpreted to bring them into line with what was now known about the world. [...] Alongside this process of doctrinal reinterpretation [...] may be seen a new concern to ground Christian faith in the world of humanity – above all, in human experience and modern culture. [...] [It has] sought to anchor that faith in common human experience, and interpret it in ways that made sense within the modern worldview. (McGrath 2001: 102)

While conservative evangelicals similarly locate their conception of the Christian faith within the evangelical tradition, in contrast to the liberal evangelicals, conservatives

place much more emphasis on the importance of protecting Christian teaching [in particular the notion of the ultimate authority of Scripture] from change or loss, preserving or conserving it. They are especially hostile to rapid and radical changes in the content of Christian doctrine. When liberals argue that the Christian tradition must accommodate new knowledge and ways of thinking, conservatives fear that this can only lead to an indiscriminate baptizing of human thinking and culture, which will forfeit Christianity's ability to challenge and critique the wisdom of the world. (Astley 2010: 16-17)

In terms of British evangelicalism, some of the notable tensions between liberal and conservative evangelicals are associated with the individuals and organisations involved in a number of significant events which occurred during the early decades of the twentieth century (Barclay 1997: 13; Tidball 1994: 99). These events included: the split in 1922 of the more conservative Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (now known as Crosslinks) from the Church Missionary Society (CMS); the creation of the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement (AEGM) also in 1922; and, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, the Inter-Varsity Conferences and eventual creation of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship of Evangelical Unions (hereafter IVF) (now known as the University and Colleges Christian Fellowship – UCCF) in 1928. This latter

organisation was set up in opposition to what was regarded by some more conservative evangelicals, as the more liberally oriented Student Christian Movement (hereafter SCM) (Barclay 1997: 13).<sup>22</sup>

In terms of referring to a particular group or movement within contemporary British evangelicalism, the expression ‘liberal evangelicals’ (also referred to as ‘modern evangelicals’ or ‘younger evangelicals’) has now gone out of usage (Tidball 1994: 100; Johnston 2001: 682).<sup>23</sup> Their precursors were evangelical moderates such as Robert W. Dale, James Denny and P.T. Forsyth. The liberal evangelicals were a broad group of evangelicals who existed in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>24</sup> Individuals included in this group, whose atonement theologies will be discussed in Chapter 3, include Travers Guy Rogers, R. T. Howard and Charles E. Raven. As it transpired, British liberal evangelicalism ‘tended gradually to be merged into the mainstream of denominations, becoming indistinguishable as a movement’ (Barclay 1997: 13). As shall be suggested in Chapter 5, the term ‘open evangelical’ is now often employed to refer to, and is also employed by, many non-conservative evangelicals in Britain. Conservative British evangelicalism continues and members and organisations located within this group will be discussed throughout the course of this thesis.

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<sup>22</sup> For a further discussion of the significance of these events within British evangelicalism see Marsden (1977: 221ff).

<sup>23</sup> However the term ‘liberal evangelical’ or ‘evangelical liberalism’ is still being used in a pejorative manner within British evangelicalism. For example, Mike Ovey (2010), the conservative evangelical Principal of Oak Hill College, London, used the expression ‘evangelical liberalism’ to apply to critics of penal substitution in the controversy in the mid-2000s: ‘Recently, we in Britain have had to confront [...] prominent evangelicals denying penal substitution but claiming they are still evangelicals’ (14).

<sup>24</sup> David Bebbington (2009a) suggested that some discernable elements of British liberal evangelicalism could still be located in events conducted by the AEGM even in the 1960s (99).

### 1.2.2 Key Aspects of British Evangelical Identity – Bebbington’s Quadrilateral

There have been numerous attempts by scholars to identify the key aspects of theology and belief around which evangelicals, and British evangelicals in particular, have, as a group, coalesced and which have been used to distinctively mark and construct their collective identity.<sup>25</sup> A particularly significant analysis however, and one which is regularly referred to in scholarship on this subject, is David Bebbington’s (1989) fourfold schema or quadrilateral set out in his book *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*.<sup>26</sup> Commenting upon the influence and significance of Bebbington’s quadrilateral, Timothy Larsen (2007) noted:

Bebbington’s definition is routinely employed to identify evangelicalism; no other definition comes close to rivalling its level of general acceptance. It is the definition used by numerous scholars who have studied aspects of evangelicalism. (1)<sup>27</sup>

Bebbington begins by conceding that while ‘Evangelicalism changed greatly over time [...] there are common features that have lasted from the first half of the eighteenth century to the second half of the twentieth’ (Bebbington 1989: 2). He goes on to summarise his quadrilateral of priorities for British evangelicalism thus:

There are four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism. (3)

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<sup>25</sup> For example: Alister McGrath (1995: 55-56); George Marsden (1984: ix-x); Timothy Larsen (2007: 1) and Mark Thompson (1995: 27).

<sup>26</sup> Concerning the influence of his quadrilateral, in the interview conducted as part of the research for this thesis, David Bebbington explained that on lecture tours in North America, he has been made aware that theological colleges such as Wheaton College, Illinois, have nominated his quadrilateral as a characterisation with which they normatively identify and, for instance, specifically challenge their first year theological students to engage with and reflect upon.

<sup>27</sup> A similar conclusion is also reached by Mathew Guest (2007: 20).

While a useful and succinct summary, each of these four identified characteristics must be examined individually in order to elucidate how each of these factors has contributed to the construction of British evangelical identity.

**(a) Conversionism**

Concerning conversionism, Bebbington identifies this characteristic as embracing the gospel priority for people ‘to turn away from their sins in repentance and [turn] to Christ in faith’ (Bebbington 1989: 5). This has traditionally been conceived as involving a profound emotional experience whereby a person is released from feelings of agony and guilt and rewarded with relief and assurance. Conversion involves a marked change of lifestyle and can result in the rejection of previous ways of living which gave rise to social problems (for example, excessive gambling or the use of drugs). Bebbington argues that historically, for many evangelicals, preaching ‘was the chief method of winning converts’ (5). Olson maintains that this characteristic reflects the origins of evangelicalism in the Great Awakenings of the 1730s and 1740s and the conversion-oriented preaching of John Wesley, George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards (Olson 2005: 161). The content of conversion-oriented preaching emphasised both the rewards in heaven for the convert as well as the torment of hell awaiting the unrepentant (Bebbington 1989: 5). Bebbington concludes that among evangelical preachers, while ‘Fear was not neglected as a motive for conversion [...] more emphasis was generally laid on the forgiving love of God’ (6). Bebbington also notes that conversionism encompasses a number of important theological doctrines such as ‘justification by faith’ (as distinct from good works) and ‘assurance’ (once saved, the believer can be assured that they possess such salvation) (6).

Differences among evangelicals concerning aspects of conversionism have historically related to issues such as the timing of conversion. Bebbington outlines that some Anglican evangelicals have been more willing to accept the notion of a 'gradual conversion' whereas mid-nineteenth-century revivalists sought to stress change at a particular moment (9). Rob Warner (2007) expresses the opinion that, 'Only in recent years have evangelicals become more sympathetic to notions of a conversion process and to the model of belonging before believing' (16).

Disagreements have also arisen concerning the 'means of conversion' and the role of the Holy Spirit relative to the 'will' of the individual convert (Bebbington 1989: 8). Finally, Bebbington points out that disagreements concerning conversionism among evangelicals have also focused upon the relationship between conversion and baptism. On the one hand, some Anglican evangelicals, for example, J.B. Sumner (1780-1862), sought to creatively engage with the apparently express declaration in the Order for Baptism in the *Book of Common Prayer* that 'an infant is declared regenerate at the end of the ceremony' (Bebbington 1989: 9). However the notion of baptismal regeneration was aggressively repudiated by other British evangelicals such as C.H. Spurgeon (1834-92) (9).

## **(b) Activism**

The second characteristic of British evangelicalism identified by Bebbington is 'activism'. Bebbington contrasts the approach taken by evangelicals with some other Christians thus:

The English parish clergyman of the later eighteenth century was very like a member of the gentry in how he spent his time. Duty consisted almost exclusively in taking services. For the Evangelical, however, pastoral work was laborious. (11)

Rob Warner (2007) argues that even in the contemporary context ‘*Activism* is undoubtedly the prevailing evangelical mind-set, always busy and sometimes frenetic paced with a world to serve and to win’ (16). The primary aim of this laborious evangelical activism is the conversion of others. One of the implications of this is that there is an imperative created once an individual’s soul is ‘won for Christ’ for that individual convert to try and win as many other souls for Christ as possible. Historically, this activism has been manifested in a range of activities including preaching; writing and distributing tracts; prayer meetings; Sunday-school teaching; visitation among the poor; and, importantly, social activism campaigns against perceived social and moral injustices, for example, slavery (Bebbington 1989: 10-11). James Hunter (1987) has referred to the social activism aspects of this characteristic as ‘a dedication to concretely address the needs of the socially and economically disadvantaged’ (40). This spirit of evangelical activism has also inspired evangelical missionary activity

the quest for souls generally drove Evangelicals out from centres of learning to the parishes and the foreign mission field. The missionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the fruit of the Evangelical Revival. (12)<sup>28</sup>

### **(c) Biblicism**

The third main feature of British evangelicalism Bebbington has identified is biblicism.

This feature is grounded in the theologies of key formative British evangelicals such

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<sup>28</sup> Bebbington does however expressly concede that with respect to missionary activity this ‘is not to claim sole credit for the Evangelicals. On the contrary, Roman Catholic missions had for long put Protestants to shame. Yet a direct result of the revival was the creation of new missionary societies, beginning with that of the Baptists in 1792, that did so much to make the Christian faith a worldwide religion’ (12).

John and Charles Wesley and is founded upon the belief that ‘all spiritual truth is to be found in [the Bible’s] pages’ (Bebbington 1989: 12). Warner (2007) expresses the view that

not all evangelicals welcome the term *biblicism*, which resonates disconcertingly for some with Barth’s critique of bibliolatry, but Bebbington’s assertion that evangelicals consider themselves grounded in the authority of Scripture is beyond dispute. (16-17)<sup>29</sup>

Bebbington maintains that one common mark of evangelical biblicism throughout the ages has been the conviction of the divine inspiration of the Bible (Bebbington 1989: 13; Olson 2005: 154). Disagreements have developed however among evangelicals as to whether this conviction regarding divine inspiration mandates positions which hold that the Bible is inerrant or infallible (Olson 2005: 154). Such disputes particularly occurred during the nineteenth century from the 1820s onwards when later evangelicals, such as Baptist pastor C.H. Spurgeon, insisted upon ‘inerrancy, verbal inspiration and the need for the literal interpretation of the Bible’ (Bebbington 1989: 14). In the so-called ‘Down Grade Controversy’ of 1887-8, Bebbington notes that Spurgeon was alarmed because he perceived that:

Modern culture, intellectual preaching and aesthetic taste [...] were obscuring the truth [...]. Spurgeon’s growing despondency about current trends culminated in 1887. He gave his backing to a series of anonymous articles appearing in his widely circulating church magazine under the heading ‘The Down Grade’. Gaining little support, he withdrew from the Baptist Union [...]. [However while] Spurgeon’s protest against emerging liberal tendencies may not have carried many with him at the time [...] [t]he Down Grade Controversy helped prepare the way for sharper divisions among Evangelicals in the following century. (Bebbington 1989: 145-6)

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<sup>29</sup> A similar observation is made by Oliver Barclay (1997: 10).



#### **(d) Crucicentrism**

The fourth feature of British evangelicalism, as identified by Bebbington, crucicentrism, and doctrines relating to this feature, such as the atonement and atonement models (including penal substitution), are the subject of detailed discussion in the next chapter. However Bebbington concludes that notwithstanding historical disagreements and diversity of opinion concerning the way in which aspects relating to the atonement and Christ's salvific work upon the cross should be properly conceived, for British evangelicals:

The reconciliation of humanity to God, that is to say, achieved by Christ on the cross is why the Christian religion speaks of God as the author of salvation. 'I am saved', wrote an early Methodist preacher, 'through faith in the blood of the Lamb'. There is a cloud of witnesses on this theme. (14)

Olson reaches a similar position that one of the key 'hallmarks of evangelical Christianity is crucicentrism – special focus and emphasis on the cross of Jesus Christ as [the] saving event' (Olson 2005: 149). This special significance was exemplified in Spurgeon's caution to the Baptist Union in 1881 'that some sermons were leaving out the atonement – and, if you leave out the atonement, what Christianity have you got to preach?' (cited in Bebbington 1989: 145).

#### **1.2.3 Responses to Bebbington's Quadrilateral**

As a result of the influence of Bebbington's quadrilateral, his approach has been subjected to considerable academic scrutiny. Rob Warner (2007) has reviewed and categorised some of the different types of responses to Bebbington's fourfold schema and included some of his own. These responses can be organised into four categories:

reordering and reprioritisation; the suggestion of additional features; the suggestion of pervading organising principles; and express criticisms of aspects of Bebbington's approach. In terms of the previous consideration in this chapter of group identity formation, these responses can also serve as a witness to the manner in which the content of identity narratives are always contested and can be the subject of advocacy for change and variation. Such contestation extends to the nature and proper interpretation of historically received narratives of a religious collective and the form such narratives should take in light of the perceived demands and priorities of particular circumstances.

**(a) Reordering and Reprioritisation**

The first category of responses has sought to reorder and thus reprioritise Bebbington's four features. Warner outlines that some more conservative evangelicals (for example, Oliver Barclay 1997) seeking to affirm the 'three cardinal areas of doctrine – revelation, redemption and regeneration' (Warner 2007: 17), have advocated a reordering of Bebbington's features thus – biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism and activism (Barclay 1997: 10-12). Warner also outlines that a 'post-Barthian evangelical'<sup>30</sup> would prefer to affirm the ultimacy of the personal revelation of the divine in Christ' (Warner 2007: 17) which would promote a reordering thus – crucicentrism, biblicism, conversionism, activism (Clive Calver and Rob Warner 1996: 94).

To be fair, Bebbington does himself concede at the outset that different evangelical individuals and groups have, over the years, emphasised and prioritised his

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<sup>30</sup> For example, Clive Calver and Rob Warner (1996: 27).

four identified characteristics differently (Bebbington 1989: 3). For example, Bebbington believes that in the early period of the eighteenth-century revivals, priority was placed upon conversionism and crucicentrism. Later, in the nineteenth century, and in response to theologians who sought to emphasise the authority of the Church and/or reason, he argues that evangelicals tended to prioritise and emphasise the primacy of scripture and biblicism. Further, Bebbington argues that for some British evangelicals in the first half of the twentieth century, activism was the priority with biblicism returning to prominence among some later twentieth-century conservative evangelicals (3). Thus Bebbington seems to be perfectly aware that there has been, and will continue to be, an ongoing reprioritising of the four key aspects he outlined in his quadrilateral.

**(b) Additional Suggested Features**

A second category of response to Bebbington's quadrilateral has sought to advocate for additional features to be included within it in order to provide what some maintain to be a more comprehensive representation of British evangelical theology (Warner 2007: 17ff). For example, a number of scholars, such as Barclay (1997: 11-12), McGrath (1995: 65), Calver and Warner (1996: 98-99) and Stackhouse (2000: 43-46) have suggested that 'Christocentricity' is a distinctive (although not unique) feature of evangelicalism. In this regard, Warner maintains that:

Evangelical preaching, piety and hymnody are characteristically, albeit not exclusively, Jesus centred [...]. [T]he doctrine of the Trinity has frequently been neglected by evangelicals in favour of Christocentricity. (Warner 2007: 17)

Explaining the rationale for the inclusion of a distinctive ‘Christ-centred’ feature of British evangelicalism, Oliver Barclay (1997) has also observed that:

The cross can become a cold doctrine, the Bible a mere collection of precepts, and the new birth a merely psychological experience, if they all do not depend totally on a personal relationship with the living Jesus Christ himself. This has been the mark of most evangelical renewals, often in subtle rather than explicit ways. (11-12)

Other scholars, such as George Marsden (1984), have further advocated the addition of a feature of evangelicalism which stresses ‘the importance of a spiritually transformed life’ (Marsden 1984: x). Yet others, including Calver and Warner (1996: 99-100) have emphasised the importance of ‘revival’ which Warner argues ‘reflects evangelicalism’s roots in the Great Awakening’ (Warner 2007: 18).<sup>31</sup>

### (c) **Additional Organising Principles**

Warner documents a third category of responses to Bebbington’s quadrilateral in which he proposes what he describes as ‘[t]wo further emphases [which] function as organising principles for evangelical thought’ (18). The first of Warner’s ‘organising principles’ seeks to emphasise

the centrality of the Protestant principle of *faith alone*. No matter how drawn to works righteousness evangelicals have often been [...] *faith not works* is the pivot of the voluntarist and convertive piety by which evangelicals have routinely distinguished themselves from nominalism and ritualism. This emphasis is a constant within the evangelical mind-set, implicitly informing evangelicals’ core convictions. (18)

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<sup>31</sup> Warner notes that Alister McGrath (1995: 68ff and 78ff) has ‘proposed two further characteristic emphases, upon the Spirit and community [...]’. Warner argues that while ‘these are certainly current evangelical distinctives in some quarters, it is doubtful they can be credibly claimed as historically persistent evangelical priorities’ (Warner 2007: 18).

Again, to be fair, Bebbington does not totally neglect the doctrine of justification by faith but refers to this principle in his discussion of conversionism (Bebbington 1989: 6).

A second organising principle for evangelical thought is advocated by John Stackhouse (2000) in what he terms ‘transdenominationalism’ (42). Warner maintains that:

Extreme schismatics apart, evangelicals have certainly tended to relativise their own denominational identity at least to some degree in favour of pan-evangelical co-operation. (Warner, 2007: 19)<sup>32</sup>

Transdenominationalism is certainly an organising principle of evangelicalism which is emphasised by contemporary conservative Anglican evangelicals such as Peter Jensen (2006: 2) and his brother, Philip Jensen (2008: para 35-36). Further, transdenominationalism clearly influences Roger Olson’s (2005) conclusion that:

Evangelicalism is a loose affiliation, coalition, network, mosaic, patchwork, family of most Protestant Christians of many orthodox (Trinitarian) denominations and independent churches and parachurch organizations. (6)

#### **(d) Express Criticisms**

A final category of responses to Bebbington’s fourfold schema can be described as holistic criticisms of the schema itself. Warner for example regards Bebbington’s approach as fundamentally ‘static’ in nature (Warner 2007: 19-20). Warner asserts that notwithstanding ‘its cogency as a conceptual framework, Bebbington’s approach represents less of a theological matrix than a static summation of the essence of the

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<sup>32</sup> The transdenominationalistic character of evangelicalism is also emphasised by George Marsden (1984: xiv).

evangelical tradition' (19).<sup>33</sup> This criticism is intriguing because notwithstanding the fact Warner displays an extremely competent understanding of Bebbington's work with respect to his quadrilateral, Warner nonetheless fails to appreciate that Bebbington himself has acknowledged that these four factors are not static. This is because throughout the history of British evangelicalism since the 1730s, different evangelical individuals and groups have contested and reprioritised the various factors. Warner's concern regarding Bebbington's schema being unduly 'static' however is also not shared by all scholars of British evangelicalism. For instance, Mathew Guest (2007) characterises as one of its virtues the very fact that:

Bebbington's scheme is also sufficiently loose to allow for changes in emphasis over time and in different contexts, highlighting key axes rather than a fixed set of creedal statements. Conceiving evangelical priorities as axes – or, using [Anthony] Cohen's language, as a common body of symbols – from which social manifestations radiate – emerging, evolving and interacting with other elements and contexts – allows for a much richer appreciation of evangelical identity and evangelical culture. (20)

Another potential line of express criticism is raised by Stephen Holmes (2007a). Firstly, Holmes challenges whether there has even ever been a distinctive British evangelical theology. He argues that British evangelicalism 'has never been a movement that is driven by, or even possessed of, a distinctive theology' (241). He further maintains that:

Any attempt to define eighteenth-century British evangelicalism as a theological movement is destined to failure. Its leaders were preachers and hymn writers, not theologians; its distinctives were practical and experimental, not doctrinal. (242)

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<sup>33</sup> Warner proposes that his response is significantly influenced by George Marsden's notion of 'conflicting priorities within pan-evangelicalism' (Warner 2007: 19).

Thus, with respect to the various elements of Bebbington's quadrilateral, while Holmes concedes that you can identify particular British evangelicals who at different times in the history of British evangelicalism have advocated, perhaps forcefully, positions concerning conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism, these do not encompass distinctive theological aspects that have been used in the construction of British evangelical identity. He goes on to conclude that:

There is no British, still less any European, evangelical theology, if by that is meant an identifiable commonly held and distinctive position; instead, there is an ongoing conversation, returning often to central themes, but in different ways, open to other voices, borrowing gratefully sometimes, pausing to denounce stridently at others – or often, different voices within the conversation responding in each of these ways. (255-256)

Holmes also challenges the notion that scholars of evangelical history such as Bebbington himself, along with Mark Noll (1994 & 2004), actually hold to the view that there are distinctive elements of evangelical theology. Instead he suggests Bebbington and Noll more correctly define evangelicalism in terms of networks, contacts, relationships and activities as opposed to defining it in terms of particular aspects of theological doctrine (Holmes 2007a: 241). In the interview conducted with Holmes, he was asked to clarify his position on this issue and again he affirmed the view that 'I am very happy with his [Bebbington's] kind of definition there. I just do not think it is doctrinal, do not think it is theological.' Rather, Holmes maintained that 'evangelicalism' is 'fundamentally a sociological term that describes a particular cultural location within the Christian movement [...] [so] no, there is not a distinctively evangelical theology.'

With respect to Bebbington, Holmes' assertion does not though accord with the interpretation of Bebbington's analysis as discussed in this chapter. It also fails to

accord with the interpretation of his fourfold schema by the other scholars discussed here who have been identified as having received and responded to Bebbington's quadrilateral. In his interview, for example, David Hilborn, the former Evangelical Alliance Head of Theology, referred to Bebbington (1989) as 'the seminal text for these sort of historical *doctrinal* developments singles out crucicentrism as one of these distinctive of evangelical identity – British evangelical identity' (emphasis added).

When asked in his interview to clarify what he was trying to convey about British evangelicalism in his quadrilateral and whether this included theological doctrines which can be regarded as having contributed to the construction of British evangelical identity, Bebbington replied that his quadrilateral

is simply specifying what the most salient features of evangelicalism have appeared to be phenomenologically. That is to say, it [British evangelicalism] is a religious movement set in great store by doctrine by and large, so it is not surprising that theological convictions loom large. [...] It is saying what evangelical identity has been over time.

With respect to Mark Noll, while Holmes' assertion is correct to the extent that Noll does focus upon what he describes as evangelical kin-networks with genealogical connections (Noll 2004: 16-17), Noll nonetheless concludes that

evangelicalism was always also constituted by the convictions that emerged [...] evangelicalism designates a consistent pattern of convictions and attitudes that have been maintained over the centuries since the 1730s. Many efforts have been made to summarize those convictions and attitudes. One of the most effective is offered by David Bebbington, who has identified four key ingredients of evangelicalism [...].(16)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Noll made a similar point in his previous study on the subject (Noll 1994: 8).



Another line of express criticism challenges the contemporary relevance of Bebbington's outlining of modern evangelical identity. Brian Harris (2008) for example, while acknowledging the schema's traditional influence upon evangelical scholarship, has nonetheless questioned whether in a postmodern context

is contemporary evangelicalism (or are contemporary evangelicalisms) characterised by the priority placed on conversionism, activism, Biblicism and crucicentrism [...] [and if] not, would other descriptors prove more accurate, desirable or both? (202)

Harris proceeds to consider each of the four aspects of Bebbington's schema in the light of responses he obtained from a small sample of theological students in Western Australia. They identified themselves as attending evangelical churches and as students of relevant contemporary evangelical scholarship. Harris concludes that:

Each priority has been shown to be the source of at least some ferment and revisioning [...]. While Bebbington's priorities remain relevant, contemporary evangelicalism might be better characterised as being a community of *passionate piety*. While at a popular level, the doctrinal focus of the past has receded, the experience of a transforming encounter with Christ remains. (212-3)

Two observations can be made with respect to this criticism. Firstly, that it, like Holmes's before, is clearly at odds with the balance of evangelical scholarship on this issue. Secondly, the controversy among British evangelicals in the mid-2000s which is the focus of this thesis, namely the doctrine of the atonement and atonement models such as penal substitution which are theological concepts which accompany crucicentrism, suggests that at least with respect to this aspect of the quadrilateral, it retains an ongoing significance that cannot be so easily dismissed.

One of the important things a consideration of the range of responses to Bebbington's work also reveals is the manner in which the narratives associated with important markers used by a religious collective in the construction of their identity are indeed contested and can therefore become the object of advocacy for change and variation. As MacIntyre (1989: 146) suggested, such contestation can relate not only to the nature and proper interpretation of historically received narratives, but also the form such narratives should take in contemporary and future contexts and in the light of the perceived demands and priorities of particular circumstances (Carroll and Roof 1993: 17). As shall be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, this trend continues with respect to the particular evangelical identity marker of crucicentrism, the theological concepts associated with this factor including the doctrine of the atonement and the various atonement models which have been developed, including penal substitution.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter an explanation has been provided of what is meant by concepts of identity and identity markers as they apply to religious collectives. In the process, the way in which religious collectives utilise various individual aspects of religion to construct and mark their identity has been explored. The approach of Nancy Ammerman in highlighting the usefulness of narrative and narrative analysis in the process of understanding identity formation, particularly for religious collectives in the contemporary context, was also considered. Secondly, by considering Roger Olson's usage structure an explanation was provided by what is meant, both in terms of this thesis and in relation to other usages, when reference is made to evangelicalism and British evangelicalism in particular. Thirdly, in the final section, David Bebbington's

fourfold schema, and scholarly response to it, has been analysed. In this process, four key aspects of theology and belief around which British evangelicals have coalesced, and which have been used through time in the construction and reconstruction of their collective religious identity have been identified. Further, wider critiques of Bebbington's approach and subsequent developments within the British evangelical movement were considered.

The next chapter takes this analysis forward with a focus upon one aspect of Bebbington's quadrilateral which is the focus of this thesis. It will provide a consideration of crucicentrism and the accompanying theological concepts of the doctrine of the atonement and particular models of the atonement, such as penal substitution.

## **Chapter 2 – Crucicentrism, Atonement and Penal Substitution**

The previous chapter focussed upon what is meant by ‘identity’ and ‘identity markers’ as can be applied to religious collectives and also what is meant by ‘British evangelicalism’. It also considered a number of ideas and concepts specifically associated with British evangelicals which have functioned as identity markers. In particular, it was noted that scholars of the history of British evangelicalism, such as David Bebbington (1989), have identified crucicentrism – a particular focus and emphasis upon the crucifixion and the Cross of Jesus Christ as the salvific event – as one of the key aspects of theology and belief around which British evangelicals have coalesced and which has been used by them to distinctively mark their collective identity.

It is important to highlight however that there exists a variety of theological concepts which accompany crucicentrism. These concepts include the multifarious atonement models elaborated during the course of the reception and theological development of the doctrine of the atonement. Penal substitution is one of these models of the atonement. In this regard, this chapter will present an exploration of the ideas surrounding the atonement, and penal substitution in particular, in further depth. The first section will examine a number of ideas which surround the atonement. As a starting point, it will consider how the atonement has generally been understood in both a ‘broader’ and in a ‘narrower’ sense. In the broader sense, atonement is wholly synonymous with reconciliation and relates to the general notion of the reunion (the at-one-ment) between God and humanity brought about by the advent of Jesus Christ. In the narrower sense, atonement focuses more specifically upon the death of Jesus as atoning, or making up, for human sin and its consequences. Crucicentrism, as it

appears, would seem to relate more directly with this narrower understanding. For this reason, the debates which have occurred, and which continue to occur, among evangelical scholars on this matter will be examined. Specifically, these debates concern a proper understanding of the key New Testament concepts and consequent motivations lying behind some of the particular positions taken up or advocated within British evangelicalism surrounding such understandings.

The remaining section will explore in more detail the concept of penal substitution itself, beginning with two contemporary definitions provided by evangelical scholars. This section will attempt to outline the historical and cultural circumstances within which the notion of penal substitution was able to emerge as a cognitive method of making sense of the death of Jesus. Consideration will be made of the atonement images to be found in the New Testament. The ways in which these biblical images have been, and continue to be, utilised by advocates of penal substitution in the process of formulating and validating their understanding of the atonement will also be discussed. Then, with reference to the seminal contribution made by the Swedish Lutheran bishop Gustaf Aulén (1931), a number of models of the atonement which have been developed in the course of Christian history will be examined.

## 2.1 The Concept of Atonement

The Church of Scotland theologian A.T.B. McGowan (2006) has observed that the ‘doctrine of the atonement is part of the unfinished business of Christian theology’ (183). This observation attests to two important issues. Firstly, the fact that, while both the New Testament authors and subsequent Christian theologians and conciliar pronouncements have professed the basic conviction that God in Jesus provides atonement between God and humankind, there has not been a uniform and singularly agreed explanation of the ‘meaning’ of Jesus’ atoning work. Secondly, that there has similarly been disagreement concerning ‘how’ this atonement actually works (Winter 1995: 30).<sup>35</sup> The concept of ‘atonement’ can therefore conveniently be regarded as having been utilised in both a broader and narrower sense, both of which will now be considered (Hick 2008: 96).<sup>36</sup>

### 2.1.1 Atonement in the Broader Sense

In the broader sense, atonement (at-one-ment) ‘signifies becoming one with God – not ontologically but in the sense of entering into a right relationship with our Creator, this being the process or state of salvation’ (Hick 2008: 96). In this broader sense, atonement is synonymous with reconciliation (Olson 2005: 149; Baillie 1961: 187; Eddy and Beilby 2006: 9; Sykes 1997: xi). Further, as applied to the salvific

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<sup>35</sup> Leon Morris (2001b) concluded that: ‘No NT [New Testament] writer sets out a theory of atonement [...]. We are left in no doubt about its [the cross’s] efficacy and complexity. View the human spiritual problem as you will, the cross meets the need. But the NT does not say how it does so’ (116). See similar observations made in Morris (2001a).

<sup>36</sup> A similar point is made by Paul Fiddes (1989: 3). Hick further argues that the broader understanding of atonement has generally been adopted in the Greek and Eastern developments of Christianity whereas the narrower understanding has been the focus of Western Christianity and theological debate within this arena (Hick 2008: 96). For a further discussion of some of the differences between Eastern and Western understandings of atonement see Symeon Rodger (1989: 38ff).

significance of Jesus, this broader understanding of atonement is not necessarily signified by any particular part of Jesus' life (such as his birth or his death) as having any greater significance, but rather focuses upon Jesus' 'self-giving life as a whole' (Hick 2008, 96).<sup>37</sup>

As well as there being discussion regarding the theological meaning of the atonement, the actual precise origins of the English word 'atonement' itself is disputed. Many scholars (for example, Paul Fiddes 1989: 3-4) hold to the view that the word was invented by the English Bible translator William Tyndale (c. 1494-1536) 'to describe reunion between God and humanity in salvation' (Olson 2005: 149). Church of England scholar Stephen Sykes (1997) provides an outline of the etymology of the English word atonement thus:

'At one' has been an adverbial phrase in English since the early fourteenth century, meaning, as now, an existence in harmony or friendship. 'To one' was formally used as a verb, signifying to make one or to unite. 'Onement' was used as a noun by Wycliffe in the fourteenth century. 'Atonement', for which there is evidence from the early sixteenth century, took the place of 'onement'. More (1478-1535) and Tyndale (1494-1536) used 'atonement', the latter to translate both Leviticus 23:28 (a reference to the Day of Atonement), and 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 [...]. From 1611 the King James 'Authorised' Version replaced 'atonement' with 'reconciliation' (2-3).

Issues relating to Biblical atonement terminology will be discussed in detail in the next section. However, concerning the Latin words which have been used to express the idea of atonement, D.P. Simpson (1959) suggests '*piaculum*' as being the

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<sup>37</sup> Pauline scholar James Dunn (2003) maintains that from the perspective of the atonement theology presented in the Pauline writings, an atonement theology that is not 'cross-focussed' is impossible: 'the centrality of the death of Jesus in Paul's gospel [...] decisively undercuts any attempt to derive an alternative scheme of salvation from Paul. Paul does not present Jesus as the teacher whose teaching is the key to saving knowledge and wisdom. Nor does he argue that Jesus' incarnation was a saving event, that the Son, by taking flesh, healed it [...]. [W]here overtones of a theology of incarnation are most readily heard, [for Paul] the soteriological moment focuses entirely on the cross (and resurrection)' (232).

most accurate (663). The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Palmer 1968) defines *piaculum* as: '1. A victim offered by way of atonement, expiatory offering. 2. A rite or offering of expiation [...] an act of atonement. 3. An act which demands expiation, sin' (1377). An examination of some of the key biblical verses in the *Latin Vulgate Bible* (Weber 1969) reveals however the use of a number of related terms for atonement such as 'expiatio' (Leviticus 16:16)<sup>38</sup> and 'propitio' (Leviticus 23:28, Romans 3:25 and Hebrews 9:5).<sup>39</sup>

### 2.1.2 Atonement in the Narrower Sense

The use of atonement in its narrower sense, in contrast with the broader sense, is focused upon the specific significance of Jesus' *crucifixion and death* as 'an act of atoning, or making up for, human sin' (Hick 2008: 96).<sup>40</sup> Sykes (1997) employs this narrower, specific type of understanding when he defines atonement as being

the forgiveness of sins by the shedding of the blood of Jesus. There is, then, a relationship between the death of Jesus [...] and the forgiveness of human sin. (2)

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<sup>38</sup> Meaning 'expiation' (Latham and Howlett 1997: 858; Palmer 1968: 649), 'cleansing' (Latham and Howlett 1997: 858), 'atonement' and 'purification' (Palmer 1968: 649).

<sup>39</sup> Meaning 'To render favourable, win over, propitiate [...] to soothe (feelings)' (Palmer 1968: 1493). Concerning some of the other modern theological languages, Peter Terrell *et al.* (1980) suggest that the modern German words for atonement are 'Sühne' (meaning atonement and expiation) and 'Buße' (meaning repentance and penitence) (37, 145 & 641). *Sühne* is probably the closer of the two words as it refers to the 'mechanism and process' of atoning whereas *Buße* is more focused upon the 'human act of a person repenting and being penitent.' A related word to the verb 'Sühnen' is 'Versöhnen' which means reconciliation, and thus, in German, 'Yom Kippur' (the Day of Atonement) is named 'Große Versöhnungstag'. Concerning the modern French, Beryl Aitkins *et al.* (1978) suggest that the French words for atonement are 'expiation' which has a similar meaning as the English word expiation, and also 'réparation', which means redress or compensation for an offence or harm that has been done (30, 272 and 572). The expression 'expier un péché' would translate into English as 'to make atonement for a sin' (30). Anthony Bartlett (2001) has therefore concluded that the English word 'atonement' 'has no parallel in romance languages, where *expiation* generally fills this semantic space. The etymology of *at-onement* gives the English a certain abstraction, seeming to set it apart from the very direct sacrificial connotations of the romance term' (3).

<sup>40</sup> See also Morris (1983: 5 and 13).



John Hick (2008) further explains that in this narrower sense

atonement refers to a specific method of receiving salvation, one presupposing that the barrier to this is sin and guilt. It is in this context that we find ideas of penalty, [...] redemption, sacrifice, oblation, propitiation, expiation, satisfaction, substitution, forgiveness, acquittal, ransom, justification, remission of sins, forming a complex of ideas which has long been central to the Western or Latin development of Christianity. (96)<sup>41</sup>

The issue of a proper translation of relevant Greek terms related to atonement in the New Testament has been the subject of vigorous debate among evangelical scholars, particularly during the twentieth century (Olson 2005: 149). The content of this debate has often concerned a proper English translation of the Greek word *hilasterion* (ἱλαστήριον) (for example, Romans 3:25), and whether this word should be correctly translated as ‘propitiation’, with the accompanying implications of appeasing God’s wrath, or as ‘expiation’, with the implication of the covering or wiping away of sin (Olson 2005: 149; Baillie 1961: 187-188; Dunn 2003: 214). The positions forwarded by the British Congregationalist C.H. Dodd (1884-1973) and the Australian Anglican Leon Morris (1914-2006) are regularly cited as illustrative examples of this contrast. Dodd (1932) favoured ‘expiation’ and explained his position thus:

In accordance with biblical usage, therefore, the substantive (*hilasterion*) would mean, not propitiation, but a ‘means by which guilt is annulled’: if a man is the agent, the meaning would be ‘a means of expiation’ [...]. The rendering propitiation is therefore misleading, for it suggests the placating of

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<sup>41</sup> The narrower concept of atonement would also seem to accord with Stephen Finlan’s (2005) understanding of the origins of Biblical atonement within cult and cultic activity: ‘we should not forget that biblical atonement terms originated within a cultic arena. The verbs that most commonly underlie “atone” in English Bibles are the Hebrew *kipper* [for example, Leviticus 16:17] and the Greek *hilaskomai* or *exilaskomai*, each of which has three main usages, to signify: (1) appeasement; soothing someone’s anger; (2) expiation, that is sacrificial cleansing; or (3) making amends’ (5).

an angry God, and although this would be in accord with the pagan usage, it is foreign to biblical usage. (55)<sup>42</sup>

While noting Dodd's argument, Leon Morris (1965) however insisted that for a proper translation of, for example, Romans 3:25 into English:

The context demands for this term a meaning which includes the idea of propitiation, for Paul [in the preceding part of Romans] has brought heavy artillery to bear in demonstrating that God's wrath and judgement are against the sinner [...] there is nothing other than this word to express the turning away of wrath. Wrath has occupied such an important place in the argument leading up to this section that we are justified in looking for some expression indicative of its cancellation in the process which brings about salvation. More than expiation is required. (200-201)

Morris (1988a) asserts in his commentary on Romans when specifically discussing Romans 3:25, that the main reason scholars such as Dodd prefer the translation 'expiation' over 'propitiation' is because

propitiation means the removal of wrath and [...] some commentators find the concept of divine wrath distasteful and unworthy; so they write it out of Scripture. If there is no wrath there is no propitiation. There are two main reasons for rejecting this approach. One is the meaning of the word Paul uses [...] the word means 'the removal of wrath.' The other is [its] context [in Romans]. Paul has mounted heavy artillery in the section [Romans] 1:18-3:20 to show that all are sinners and subject to the wrath of God. But unless the present term means the removal of wrath he has left them there, still under God's wrath. [...] Christ's death means the removal of the divine wrath from believing sinners (180-181).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> James Dunn (2003) similarly favours expiation over propitiation because he maintains that the problem with propitiation: 'is that it invariably evokes the idea of appeasing God, whereas in Rom. 3:25 Paul explicitly states that it is God himself who provided the *hilasterion*. More to the point, Hebrew usage contrasts markedly with common Greek usage on this precise point. Characteristically in Greek usage the human being is the active subject and God is the object: the human action propitiates God. But in Hebrew usage God is never the object of the key verb (*kipper*). Properly speaking, in the Israelite cult, God is never 'propitiated' or 'appeased'. The object of the atoning act is rather the removal of *sin*—that is, by purifying the person or object, or by wiping out the sin' (214).

<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, an example of Anglican desires for consensus can be located in the 1938 Church of England report on Christian doctrine which on this issue holds that 'the Cross is a 'propitiation' and 'expiation' for the sins of the whole world. Christ, by the submission of His sinless life to the consequences of sin, created the conditions in which God can and does take the penitent sinner into the full fellowship of His Kingdom and treat Him [sic] as His child. The redeeming love of God, through the life of Jesus Christ sacrificially offered in death upon the Cross, acted with cleansing power upon a sin-

Traditionally, more conservative evangelicals have preferred the translation ‘propitiation’ with its emphasis upon the appeasement or removal of God’s wrath, whereas more liberal theologians have favoured ‘expiation’ which emphasises the wiping away and cleansing of sin as a more accurate translation (Olson 2005: 149). As will now be demonstrated, notions of propitiation support and justify more juridical understandings of the atoning work of Christ (such as in relation to penal substitution) which have been embraced and preferred by more conservative evangelicals.<sup>44</sup>

## **2.2 The Concept of Penal Substitution**

### **2.2.1 Defining Penal Substitutionary Atonement**

To begin our consideration of penal substitution, two concise contemporary definitions of what is meant by this theological concept are offered in two works on the subject. Both of these definitions were generated as a result of the controversy among British evangelicals concerning penal substitution during the mid-2000s. The first was outlined in a book by a group of ardent British evangelical advocates of penal substitution connected with Oak Hill College, London, namely, Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey and Andrew Sach (2007a). Jeffery *et al.* maintain that:

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stained world, and so enables us to be cleansed’ (Church of England Commission on Christian Doctrine 1938: 93).

<sup>44</sup> An example of how a translation of the New Testament Greek word *hilasterion* as ‘propitiation’, with its accompanying emphasis upon the appeasement of God’s anger and wrath, could be used by conservative evangelicals to provide scriptural evidence to support their advocacy of juridical atonement models such as penal substitution, can be located in D. Stephen Long’s (2007) definition of penal substitution which reads thus: ‘Jesus takes the penalty of God’s wrath for us sinners upon himself and acquits us of the judgement we deserve. It is ‘judicial’ and moves us from a state of sin to one of grace’ (81).

The doctrine of penal substitution states that God gave himself in the person of his Son to suffer instead of us the death, punishment and curse due to fallen humanity as the penalty for sin. (Jeffery *et al.* 2007a, 21)

A second definition is offered by Mark Thompson (2010)<sup>45</sup> in his capacity as Chairman of the Doctrine Commission of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Australia: ‘The doctrine of the atonement known as ‘penal substitution’ says that, on the cross, Christ paid the penalty of death in the place of sinners’ (para 16). Penal substitution

makes the claim that Christ’s death is fundamentally an act by which reconciliation between God and man [sic] is achieved by Christ acting in place of, or taking the place of sinners, by undergoing the punishment, penalty or judgment which was due to them. (para 15)

Defined in a manner such as that outlined above, penal substitution can be regarded therefore as having two basic aspects (Packer 1974: 17). Firstly, such definitions imply the proposition that Jesus’ death was vicarious or ‘substitutionary’. The Anglican evangelical theologian and advocate of penal substitution J.I. Packer (1974) proposes the following definition of this first aspect in terms of

the putting of one person or thing in the place of another. [...] Substitution is, in fact, a broad idea that applies whenever one person acts to supply another person’s need, or to discharge his obligation, so that the other no longer has to carry the load for himself [sic]. (17)

He asserts that there is clear scriptural warrant for affirming this first aspect which can be located, for example, when Paul talks plainly of: ‘But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.’ (Romans 5:8).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The circumstance which resulted in the compiling of the report Thompson (2010) will be discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>46</sup> Thompson (2010) also cites the following additional biblical references: “‘Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures’ (1 Cor. 15:3); “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1

However there is also a second aspect which functions as an anchor or qualifier to this substitutionary death; it is modified by the adjective ‘penal’. This notion has connotations of the juridical and is concerned with ‘the world of moral law, guilty conscience, and retributive justice’ (25). This anchor ‘presupposes a penalty (*poena*) due to us from God the Judge for wrong done and failure to meet his [sic] claims’ (29).<sup>47</sup> Packer asserts that the ‘*locus classicus* on this is Romans 1:18–3:20’<sup>48</sup>, but the thought is expressed everywhere in the New Testament’ (29). Thompson also notes the importance of the ‘suffering servant songs’ in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 in the scriptural justification which is regularly invoked in support of this second ‘penal’ aspect:

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Pet.2:24); “... we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died” (2 Cor. 5:14); “God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us ...”(2 Cor. 5:21)’ (para 16).

<sup>47</sup> For some further biblical support for penal substitution which Packer identifies see (Packer 1974: 44–45).

<sup>48</sup> An alternative interpretation of the juridical references in Pauline writings such as Romans is offered by the British evangelical and New Testament scholar Tom Wright (2002). Wright’s work is associated with the so-called ‘New Perspectives on Paul’. Concerning this approach John Barclay (2010) observed that in contrast with the traditional reformed Lutheran approach ‘in current Pauline studies [...] [the] last generation of scholars has been at pains to point out how *Jewish* Paul is, not only in his intellectual resources, but also in his cultural framing of the Christ-event. My teachers (Tom Wright and Morna Hooker) and many of my contemporaries would insist, for instance, that Paul’s comprehension of Christ is framed by a Scriptural narrative, that Paul’s theology is basically a reconfigured Jewish discourse, and that the Christ-event is (simply) “the climax of the covenant” ’ (179). Accordingly, Wright (2002) maintained that in Romans, for example, ‘Covenant and lawcourt are far more closely linked than often imagined. Behind both categories there stands a fundamental Jewish self-perception, which, if we grasp it, will enable us to understand things Paul holds together in many passages in Romans, but which interpreters have consistently separated’ (399). Critical of Pauline scholars who have followed the traditional reformed Lutheran approach, Wright laments that ‘Romans has suffered for centuries from being made to produce vital statements on questions it was not written to answer. All that has been said so far [...] will seem strange to those traditions of reading the letter that assume its central question to be that of Martin Luther: “How can I find a gracious God?”’ If we start there, as many commentaries will reveal, Paul’s discussion of Israel and its Torah either takes secondary place or, worse, is relegated to a more abstract and generalized discussion of the sin and salvation of humans in general, in which the question of Israel’s fate is essentially a side issue’ (403). Wright maintains that an informed interpretation will appreciate that ‘In biblical thought, sin and evil are seen in terms of injustice—that is, of a fracturing of the social and human fabric. What is required, therefore, is that justice be done, not so much in the punitive sense that phrase often carries (though punishment comes into it), but in the fuller sense of setting to rights that which is out of joint, restoring things as they should be. Insofar, then, as God’s covenant with Israel was designed, at the large scale, to address the problem of human sin and the failure of creation as a whole to be what its creator had intended to be, the covenant was the means of bringing God’s justice to the world’ (399).

This prophecy speaks of the servant of the Lord who was ‘wounded for our transgression’ and ‘crushed for our iniquities.’ ‘Upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed, precisely because ‘the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all’ (Isa. 53:5–6). (para 17)<sup>49</sup>

However, in order to be in a position to understand what these definitions really mean, and indeed what we are referring to when we use the term penal substitution as opposed to other atonement models, it is necessary to take two crucial conceptual and historical steps backwards. Firstly, consideration needs to be given to the reality of, and possible motivations for, the different atonement images to be found in the New Testament. After all, theologians, both historically and in the present, have derived and validated their atonement theologies, to a significant extent, from these biblical images. Further, as Paul Fiddes (1989) has observed, theologians have made and continue to make specific choices and to foreground particular biblical images to support their views. For instance, those working after the New Testament period developed various models of atonement in the context of particular historical settings and in response to specific historical understandings of the human condition and the perceived estrangement between God and humankind. As will be argued later in this chapter, the highlighting of a penal or juridical interpretation of atonement, as has been done in the definitions considered above, is properly characterised as being one among many possible atonement models which can be drawn from biblical imagery.

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<sup>49</sup> There are also numerous biblical scholars who challenge the validity of a Christological interpretation of Isaiah 52-53. A discussion of this issue will be made in the critical analysis of some of the main arguments forwarded in the controversy which is the focus of this thesis in Chapter 4.

### 2.2.2 Atonement Images in the New Testament

There are a variety of what have been termed: ‘picture-words’ (Morris 1983: 12), ‘motifs’ (Quinn 2000: 51), ‘images’ (Green and Baker 2000: 97; Morris 1983: 13), ‘idea-complexes’ (Jeremias 1963: 12, 15), ‘metaphors’ (Dunn 2003: 231) and ‘suppressed or implicit narratives’ (Sykes 1997: 16) to be found in the New Testament to explain the meaning and effect of Jesus’ death on the Cross. The North American evangelical scholars Joel Green and Mark Baker (2000) have chosen to organise the variety of Biblical images concerning the meaning and workings of Jesus’ death into

five constellations of images [...] each borrowed from significant spheres of public life in ancient Palestine and the larger Greco-Roman world [...] [which] provide a window into a cluster of terms and concepts that relate to that particular sphere of public life. (97)<sup>50</sup>

The five images Green and Baker suggest are: ‘justification’ – a concept borrowed from legal courts; ‘redemption’ – which arises within commercial dealings; ‘reconciliation’ – which occurs within personal relationships in groups or between individuals; ‘sacrifice’ – which is located within worship; and ‘triumph over evil’ – which comes from a military context and the battlefield (97).

There is indeed ample scriptural evidence identifiable in the New Testament writings to support each of these five images. Firstly, concerning the image of

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<sup>50</sup> There are other examples which can be identified of the ways in which scholars have chosen to categorise and present the different Biblical images concerning the significance and effect of Jesus’ death which could equally be highlighted. Leon Morris (1983) has isolated similar images to Green and Baker including: sacrifice, reconciliation, substitution, redemption and the making of peace (203-4). John McIntyre (1992) also focuses upon a number of other New Testament images including: ransom, redemption, salvation, sacrifice, propitiation, expiation, reconciliation, divine victory, punishment/penalty, satisfaction, example and liberation (McIntyre 1992: 29ff). Ronald Wallace (1981) examines the New Testament atonement images under the headings of: reconciliation, justification, redemption, revelation and salvation (Wallace 1981: 32ff). James Dunn (2003) examines specifically Pauline metaphors concerning the significance of Jesus’ death in terms of: representation, sacrifice, curse, redemption, reconciliation and conquest of the powers (Dunn 2003: 231).

‘justification’, Paul uses this term repeatedly and specifically in relation to the significance of Jesus’ death (Romans 5:8–9) and in his discussion of the salvation offered to both Jews and Gentiles (Galatians 2:16, 19–21). The second image of ‘redemption’ is demonstrated in Luke-Acts with the persistent linking of the significance of Jesus’ redemptive death with the ‘prototypical act of deliverance in the Old Testament: the liberation of God’s people from Egypt’ (Green and Baker 2000: 100). Like Moses, Jesus is conceived of as the agent of God’s deliverance for God’s people from oppression and sin. An example of this image can be found in Zechariah’s song at the beginning of Luke’s Gospel (1:68–71).

Concerning the third image identified by Green and Baker regarding ‘reconciliation’, in his Letter to the Romans, Paul writes expressly of the reconciliatory effects of Jesus’ death (5:10–11). Further, in the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul talks of reconciliation in terms of the peace between Jew-Gentile and God achieved through Jesus’ death (2:14–16). With regard to the fourth image of ‘sacrifice’, Jesus is regularly imaged as being a sacrificial lamb. Paul, for example, writes of Jesus as ‘our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed’ (1 Corinthians 5:6). In John’s gospel we also find the image in John the Baptist’s initial prophetic declaration concerning Jesus: ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ (1:29) and, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ (1:36). This sacrificial image is also repeated in the Book of Revelation (5:6) and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews also specifically invokes images from the Jewish sacrificial system (9:11–14). Finally, concerning the image of ‘triumph over evil’, Jesus himself utilises this image in the interpretation of his own death as presented in John’s Gospel (12:31–33), as again does Paul (Colossians 2:13–15).



Concerning this issue of there being such a variety of images concerning the atonement and metaphors associated with the significance of Jesus' death located in the New Testament writings, Green and Baker (2000) have offered three broad suggestions. Firstly, they maintain that by its nature, atonement language is metaphorical and thus no single metaphor or atonement model could express or capture all of the truth regarding the significance of Jesus' death which the writers collectively or individually seek to convey (98). With respect to the Pauline writings, James Dunn (2003) supports this conclusion:

Paul uses a rich and varied range of metaphors in his attempt to spell out the significance of Christ's death [...]. It is important to recognize their character as metaphors: the significance of Christ's death could be adequately expressed only in imagery and metaphor. As with all metaphors, the metaphor is not the thing itself but a means of expressing its meaning [...]. Presumably the point is that no one metaphor is adequate to unfold the full significance of Christ's death. The fact that they do not always fit well together (Col. 2.11–15!)<sup>51</sup> makes the same point. (231)

Secondly, the plurality of images reflects the varying pastoral needs of the specific audiences initially envisaged by each writer; differing circumstances for individuals and congregations require different metaphorical presentations:

In what language a person construes the efficacy of Jesus' death is dependent in part on the needs the person hopes to address [...]. If people are lost, they need to be found. If they are oppressed by hostile powers, they need to be delivered. If they exist in a state of enmity, they need to be reconciled. And so on. (Green and Baker 2000: 98)

A third related reason for the variety of Biblical images arises from the multi-national character and universal mission of the emerging early Christian church.

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<sup>51</sup> In Colossians 2:11–15 Paul seems to combine juridical, *Christus Victor* and exemplar atonement theologies.

According to this understanding, different metaphors were required for different cultural contexts to which the New Testament writings were addressed. Certain metaphors and images applicable to Jewish religious life and which related to existing Jewish sacred writings and religious concepts may not have been applicable for ‘the wider public discourse of Roman antiquity’ (99). Thus a plurality of images emerged as different writers conveyed their central message in different contexts and cultural locations with differing concerns.

The varied images in the New Testament writings themselves then have provided a springboard for scholars and theologians, from New Testament times to the present, to advocate in favour of different emphases regarding the meaning of atonement. Such a range of emphases have themselves similarly emerged from different settings and situations.

### **2.2.3 The Development of the Different Atonement Models**

In the centuries after the completion of the New Testament manuscripts, the early church canonised specific theories about the person of Christ (in the Chalcedonian Creed)<sup>52</sup> and the nature of the Trinity (in the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Creed) (Morris 2001b: 117; McIntyre 1992: 1). However a similar canonical clarification did not occur in this period (and indeed, has never occurred) with respect to the atonement (Winter 1995: 41; Morris 2001b: 117; McIntyre 1992: 1). It would appear that the early church ‘simply held to the satisfying truth that Christ saved them by way of the Cross and did

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<sup>52</sup> The Council of Chalcedon was convoked by Emperor Marcian (396-457) in 451CE and is regarded as the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Livingstone 2006: 110).

not argue about how this salvation was effected' (Morris 2001b: 117). This situation has motivated scholars such as John McIntyre (1992) to caution that:

Anyone approaching the study of the death of Christ, and seeking for a definitive understanding of the classical words of St Paul (1 Cor 15:3), 'Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures', encounters an immediate stumbling block. [...] [T]he manner in which the death of Christ, particularly in relation to the forgiveness of sins, is referred to in the credal and latter confessional statements of the Church and the Churches is singularly frugal, very varied, and nowhere approaches the sophistication which the doctrines of God and of the Person of Christ achieve at the hands both of the orthodox and heretical expositors. (1)

One of the primary reasons for the different treatment of the atonement, in comparison to the Trinity and the person of Christ, was the absence of corresponding doctrinal controversies concerning the salvific work of Christ. In such absence, there were not the similar debates about the atonement. Corresponding heretical atonement positions were also not identified with conciliar clarification with respect to the doctrine of the atonement beyond the basic acknowledgement in the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Creed that: 'For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven' (O'Collins 1995: 279; Morris 2001b:117; McIntyre 1992:1).

Another reason for this situation which has been suggested, is that the early Church's understanding of Christ's death, and this event's relationship to salvation and the forgiveness of sin, was integral to the worship-life of the church (particularly in the Eucharist) as opposed to the thought-life of the church's theologians (McIntyre 1992: 10, 20). Thus while the first generation of Christian writers after the New Testament (including theologians such as Irenaeus (c. 130-200), Origen (c. 185-254) and Athanasius (c. 296-374)) began the process, it was their work, together with the images set out in the New Testament writings, which were subsequently incorporated and

utilised in the more systematic ‘models’ of the atonement developed by subsequent theologians (McIntyre 1992: 16).

Concerning the variety of images or models of the atonement, which can be identified as being used throughout the Church’s history, British Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes (1989) asserts that these can be understood as a result of the different conceptions of the cause of the estrangement between God and humankind (which Fiddes terms ‘the human predicament’). Thus, ‘Different images of atonement have gripped the imagination at different periods of history, because the understanding of the basic human predicament has changed from age to age’ (Fiddes 1989: 5).<sup>53</sup> One of the most famous attempts at providing a framework to classify the different atonement models which will now be considered is that of the Swedish Lutheran bishop Gustaf Aulén (1879-1977) in his book *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (1931).<sup>54</sup> In identifying three main atonement models proposed by theologians over the centuries, Aulén also explains why he favours one model in particular.

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<sup>53</sup> A similar point is made by Paul Tillich (1957): ‘The term ‘salvation’ has as many connotations as there are negatives from which salvation is needed. But one can distinguish salvation from the ultimate negativity and from that which leads to ultimate negativity. Ultimate negativity is called condemnation and/or external death, the loss of the inner *telos* of one’s being, the exclusion from the universal unity of the Kingdom of God, and the exclusion from eternal life. In the overwhelming majority of occasions in which the word ‘salvation’ or the phrase ‘being saved’ is used, it refers to salvation from this ultimate negativity’ (191). See also Timothy Gorringer (1996) who similarly concludes that ‘different accounts of sin generate different atonement theologies’ (112).

<sup>54</sup> As to the significance of Aulén’s book, see for example: Stephen Sykes (1997: 6-8); Stephen Smith (2001:124); Eddy and Beilby (2006: 11-14); William Loewe (1985: 1); and George Rupp (1974:14-15).

(a) **Gustaf Aulén's Three Atonement Models – Satisfaction, Subjective and *Christus Victor***

The first model Aulén considers is the satisfaction or Latin model which is traditionally associated with the work of Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109) (Green and Baker 2000: 126ff; Southern 1990: 221ff; Gunton 1988: 87). This approach primarily conceives of the atonement in objective terms: 'according to which God is the object of Christ's atoning work, and is reconciled through the satisfaction made to His justice' (Aulén 1931: 2). Fiddes argues that during the Middle Ages,<sup>55</sup> the societal concerns in which Anselm would have lived, were focused upon feudal obligations and the maintenance of order:

Chaos ensued when loyalty and honour were no longer paid to the overlord by his vassals, and order could only be restored if the debt of honour were paid – either by compensation or by penalty inflicted. In this cultural context the human predicament before God was seen as failure 'to render to God his due', and atonement could be understood as settling a debt which human beings could not repay. (Fiddes 1989: 8)

Thus in Anselm's famous work, *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Man)

(c. 1099),<sup>56</sup> we can locate clear evidence of such a societal context when he writes:

For, suppose there were a king against whom all the people of his provinces had rebelled, with but a single exception [...]. And suppose that he who alone is blameless had so great favour with the king, and so deep love for us, as to be both able and willing to save all those who trusted in his guidance; and this because of a certain very pleasing service which he was about to do for the king [...] the king grants, on account of the greatness of the service performed, that whoever, either before or after the day appointed,

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<sup>55</sup> E.A. Livingstone locates the Middle Ages as 'the era preceding the Renaissance, now usually taken to date from c. 1100, and extending to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century' (Livingstone 2006: 386).

<sup>56</sup> Commenting upon the significance of Anselm's work, Colin Gunton (1988) has noted that, 'It was Anselm of Canterbury who achieved the definitive systematic treatment of the atonement in terms of *satisfaction* [...]. It is important to remember also that Anselm's is one of the first essays in a systematic theology of the atonement, attempting to bring intellectual shape to an area where there had been much disorder. Anselm was sharply critical of what had been until this time the chief accounts of the matter. As the histories of doctrine show, a number of theologies of the atonement existed side by side in the centuries before him, and they tended to represent variations, and not always very subtle ones, on the theme of ransom' (87).

acknowledged that he wished to obtain pardon by the work that day accomplished, and to subscribe to the condition there laid down, should be freed from all past guilt; and, if they sinned after this pardon [...] they should again be pardoned [...]. (2.16)<sup>57</sup>

Reflecting this societal context, Anselm then observed, concerning both the human predicament and the significance of the death of Jesus in his *Meditatio Redemptionis Humanae* (A Meditation on Human Redemption) ([c.1100] 2000) that

to sin is to dishonour God; and man ought not to dishonour God [...] clear reason demands that the sinner give to God, in place of the honour stolen, something greater than that for which he ought not to have dishonoured God. But human nature by itself did not have this payment. And without the required satisfaction human nature could not be reconciled, lest Divine Justice leave a sin unreckoned-with in His kingdom. Therefore, Divine Goodness gave assistance. The Son of God assumed a human nature into His own person, so that in this person He was the Godman, who possessed what exceeded not only every being which is not God but also every debt which sinners ought to pay. And since He owed nothing for Himself, He paid this sum for others who did not have what they were indebted to pay. (421-422)<sup>58</sup>

Contrasted with this in Aulén's examination is the second subjective or humanistic model of the atonement. This is traditionally identified with the work of Peter Abelard (1079-1142/3). Aulén argues that the subjective model of the atonement embraces 'a doctrine which explains the Atonement as consisting essentially in a

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<sup>57</sup> Commenting further upon Anselm's historical social context, R.W. Southern (1990) apologetically forwards the view that: 'In practice Anselm accepted the oppressive social framework of his day because it was the only social order that he knew. He knew very well that lords, more often than not, were brutal, licentious, and violent. But they represented order [...]. We may regret that God should appear in the guise of a lord castigating disobedient serfs, but this was the only appropriate image available to him [...]. [This] background, which sets Anselm as far apart from patristic as from modern, or even later medieval thought, is the complex of feudal relationships' (224-225).

<sup>58</sup> Southern (1990) explains Anselm's understanding of the human predicament and the atonement thus: 'God's honour is the complex of service and worship which the whole Creation, animate and inanimate, in Heaven and earth, owes to the Creator, and which preserves everything in its due place. Regarded in this way, God's honour is simply another word for the ordering of the universe in its due relationship to God. In withholding his service, a man is guilty of attempting to put himself in the place of the Creator. He fails; but in making this attempt, he excludes himself from, and to the extent of his power destroys, the order and beauty of the universe. His rebellion requires a counter-assertion of God's real possession of his honour, not to erase an injury to God, but to erase a blot on the universal order. To do this, God as Man makes good the damage; and God as Lord takes *seisin* [possession] of his honour once more. And so the whole *servitium debitum* [owed servitude] of the universe is re-established, and God's 'honour' in its full extent is displayed in the restored order and beauty of the whole' (226).

change taking place in men [sic] rather than a changed attitude on the part of God' (Aulén 1931: 2).

Fiddes maintains that shortly after the appearance of the honour satisfaction model, Europe of the early twelfth century also witnessed the emergence of a 'new intensity of emotion [which] erupted and was expressed in the secular poetry of courtly love, and in religious lyrics' (Fiddes 1989: 9). In this context, some theologians, notably Abelard, came to conceive of the human predicament in terms of 'a loss of love [with] the corresponding concept [...] of the cross as a mighty demonstration of the love of God, turning human hearts back to God' (Fiddes 1989: 9).<sup>59</sup> There is evidence which can be located in Abelard's *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* ([c.1120s] 1956) to support Fiddes's basic assertion. First, Abelard appears to expressly reject ransom or satisfaction understandings of the significance of the death of Jesus when he writes

how cruel and wicked it seems that anyone should demand the blood of an innocent person as the price for anything, or that it should in any way please him that an innocent man should be slain – still less that God should consider the death of his Son so agreeable that by it he should be reconciled to the whole world! (283)<sup>60</sup>

In place of this type of understanding Abelard proposes that

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<sup>59</sup> Hastings Rashdall (1919) similarly concluded that, 'In Abelard not only the ransom theory but any kind of substitutionary or expiatory atonement is explicitly denied. We get rid altogether of the notion of a mysterious guilt which, by an abstract necessity of things, required to be extinguished by death or suffering, no matter whose. [...] The efficacy of Christ's death is now quite definitely and explicitly explained by its subjective influence upon the mind of the sinner. The voluntary death of the innocent Son of God on man's [sic] behalf moves the sinner to gratitude and answering love – and so to consciousness of sin, repentance, amendment [...] he sees that God can only be supposed to forgive by making the sinner better, and therefore removing any demand for punishment' (358-359).

<sup>60</sup>See also Timothy Gorringe (1996) who similarly interprets Abelard as rejecting satisfaction and expiatory understandings of the atonement (109-110).

through this unique act of grace manifested to us – in that his Son has taken upon himself our nature and persevered therein in teaching us by word and example even unto death – he has more fully bound us to himself by love; with the result that our hearts should be enkindled by such a gift of divine grace, and true charity should not now shrink from enduring anything for him [...]. Yet everyone becomes more righteous – by which we mean a greater lover of the Lord – after the Passion of Christ than before, since a realised gift inspires greater love than one which is only hoped for. Wherefore, our redemption through Christ's suffering is that deeper affection in us which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but also wins for us the true liberty of sons of God, so that we do all things out of love rather than fear [...]. (283-284)

Although many scholars, for example Green and Baker (2000: 138-139) and Aulén (1931: 2), have generally characterised Abelard's atonement theology as being primarily 'subjective', others such as Richard Weingart (1970) and F.W. Dillestone (1968) have maintained that such a blanket characterisation warrants some caution. Weingart argues that:

It is too generally assumed that in his short paragraph in the Romans exposition [which is extracted above] Abailard<sup>61</sup> offers a soteriology which may be summarized in one sentence: The exemplary life and death of the sinless Son of God on man's [sic.] behalf reveals the nature of divine love and thus moves the sinner to a like response of love [...]. [However for Abelard the] love of God revealed in Jesus Christ is an example of sacrificial love to be imitated in the life of the Christian, but its exemplary quality is secondary, consequent upon its redemptive character. The action of God in Christ is direct, not indirect; man's responsive act of love is a direct result of Christ's gracious transformation of the sinner's person. (Weingart 1970: 125-126)<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> This is an alternate English spelling of the name that is adopted by some translators and scholars.

<sup>62</sup> F.W. Dillstone (1968) has similarly observed that, 'The place of Abelard in atonement theology has been repeatedly discussed and he is normally distinguished as the arch-exponent of what is called the subjective theory. But such a categorization tends to be confusing and unhelpful. In reality Abelard marks the transition from an outlook which saw God dealing with humanity as a whole, either through a legal transaction or through a mystical transfusion, to one in which the ethical and psychological qualities of the individual within the community began to receive fuller recognition. With profound psychological insight Abelard saw that nothing is more powerful to move the will from its apathetic acquiescence in some sinful habit than the sight of the One who actually suffered on account of our sins and bore their penalty in His death. Love begets love and if only the Cross can be seen as the supreme manifestation of vicarious Divine love then man will be moved in his inmost being and will respond in love to his Redeemer. And his response will not simply be an affair of the emotions. It will issue in a new form of ethical living of the same basic pattern as that of the Redeemer Himself' (325).



Aulén's third and favoured atonement model is what he terms the classical or *Christus Victor* (Christ the Conqueror) approach which emphasises 'the 'dramatic' (Aulén 1931: 2). Aulén maintains that, concerning the *Christus Victor* approach:

Its central theme is the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ – *Christus Victor* – fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind [sic] is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself. (2)

This approach is more typical of the earlier Patristic period<sup>63</sup> during which 'the human predicament was frequently understood as that of being oppressed by hostile powers' (Fiddes 1989: 7). This in turn prompted an understanding of Jesus' death as a triumph and a victory over evil, the devil and all that threatens life (Fiddes 1989: 7).

Included in this *Christus Victor* approach is the so-called 'ransom' model of the atonement (Green and Baker 2000: 121-123; and Quinn 2000: 51). The ransom model is derived from the scriptural reference in Mark 10:45 where Jesus' understanding of the significance of his forthcoming death is explained thus: 'For the Son of Man came [...] to give his life a ransom for many'. Theologians such as Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-c. 200) wrote of Jesus 'Redeeming us by his blood in accordance with his reasonable nature, he gave himself [as] a ransom for those who had been led into captivity' (Irenaeus c. 182a: V.1), Concerning the issue of 'to whom' the ransom was to be paid, both Origen of Alexandria (c. 185-c. 254) and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-c. 395), in slightly different ways, suggested the recipient was the devil (Green and Baker 2000: 122-123). Gregory of Nyssa (c. 371) talked in terms of:

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<sup>63</sup> The patristic period usually refers to the era of the writings of the early Church Fathers which spans the time between the completion of the New Testament writings and the end of the eighth century CE. See Livingstone (2006: 442).

The Enemy [the devil], therefore, beholding in Him [Jesus] such power, saw also in Him an opportunity for an advance, in the exchange, upon the value of what he held. For this reason he chooses Him as a ransom for those who were shut up in the prison of death. (XXIII)

Included within this *Christus Victor* approach is also the ‘recapitulation’ model (Green and Baker 2000: 119). This model developed during a period of declining concern with mythology and increasing regard for philosophical, especially Platonic, notions (Fiddes 1989: 8). In this period the human predicament

was widely understood to be the great difference between an immortal soul and the body in which it was imprisoned [...]. According to the Christian view of creation, the material body was not evil in itself, but it was still seen as hampering the soul and thwarting its ascent to the true spiritual world because sin was believed to have worked its greatest havoc in the physical areas of life. Sin caused mortality, corruption and death which held back the soul destined for eternal life. (8)

As a result of this understanding of the human predicament, the atoning work of Christ emphasised his function in the renewal ‘of the image of the immortal God in the whole human being, flesh and spirit. Salvation was divinisation, in the sense of raising humanity to share in the life of God’ (8). The theme of recapitulation was emphasised by Irenaeus (c. 130-200) in his *Against Heresies* when he instructed that

the Lord then was manifestly coming to His own things, and was sustaining them by means of that creation which is supported by Himself, and was making a recapitulation of that disobedience which had occurred in connection with a tree, through the obedience which was [exhibited by Himself when He hung] upon a tree, [the effects] also of that deception being done away with, by which that virgin Eve, [...] was happily announced, through means of the truth [spoken] by the angel to the Virgin Mary [...]. For in the same way the sin of the first created man (*protoplasti*) receives amendment by the correction of the First-begotten [...]. (c.182b: V.XIX.I)

Irenaeus therefore concluded that:

For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons? (Irenaeus c.182c: III.XIX.I)<sup>64</sup>

As to why Aulén favoured the *Christus Victor* model over the other two, his basic (and subsequently controversial) argument is that it is the dominant and authentic view of the New Testament writings and the first thousand years of Church history. In contrast he maintained that the other models were less authentic developments of the Middle Ages (Aulén 1931: 6).<sup>65</sup> Aulén also asserted that while subsequent ‘Lutheran doctrine’ promotes the Latin satisfaction model, Martin Luther (1483-1546) himself actually promoted the *Christus Victor* model (121-122). Thus as a theologian from a reformed Christian denomination, Aulén seems to be effectively implying that promotion of this model is more consistent and faithful to the position of one of the key theological patrons of his Church of Sweden and the broader Lutheran tradition.

#### **(b) Critique of Aulén’s Threefold Atonement Model Classification**

The popularity and attention which has been given to Aulén’s threefold classification means that it has naturally been the subject of significant critique. One type of response has been to essentially embrace Aulén’s threefold model classification but supplement

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<sup>64</sup> This understanding of Irenaeus strongly echoes some of the New Testament writings of Paul. See particularly 1 Corinthians 15: 45-49.

<sup>65</sup> Aulén therefore concluded that: ‘The classic idea [*Christus Victor*] has in reality held a place in the history of Christian doctrine whose importance it would not be easy to exaggerate. Though it is expressed in a variety of forms, not all of which are equally fruitful, there can be no dispute that it is the dominant idea of the Atonement throughout the early church period [...]. It has therefore every right to claim the title of the *classic Christian idea of the Atonement*. But if this be the case, any account of the history of the doctrine which does not give full consideration to this type of view cannot fail to be seriously misleading’ (Aulén 1931: 6-7).

this by adding additional models, for example, a ‘sacrificial’ model (Oliver Quick 1938: 221-222) or juridical, ‘penal substitution’ type model (Green and Baker 2000: 140ff). Other critics of Aulén’s work have sought to challenge some of the specific fundamental assertions he made. For example, the validity of the assumption Aulén makes concerning the *Christus Victor* model dominating Christian thought during the patristic and Apostolic periods to the exclusion of other models (Evenson 1957: 740-741; Fairweather 1961: 172-173; Loewe 1985: 14; McIntyre 1992: 43). Another of Aulén’s assertions which has been challenged concerns his position regarding Luther’s atonement theology. George Evenson (1957), for example, maintains that while Luther did promote atonement models such as the *Christus Victor* model, this does not mean that Luther failed to promote other models, in particular, the Latin satisfaction model (Evenson 1957: 741-743; Peters 1972: 309-310). Some have taken issue with aspects of Aulén’s understanding of Anselm’s atonement theology. This is primarily with respect to Aulén having allegedly misrepresented Anselm’s atonement theology by erroneously suggesting that Anselm separates the incarnation from the atonement in his honour satisfaction approach (Peters 1972: 307).

Yet others have challenged the distinctions implied by Aulén’s classification process. Evenson (1957) for instance, maintains that on their own and in isolation from the Latin satisfaction model (which he believes is the lynchpin for the doctrine of the atonement), the other so-called *Christus Victor* and subjective models fail to adequately explain the atonement and answer the question, ‘Why did Jesus die?’ (747-749). As will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters, this issue has been a major point of contention among British evangelicals with respect to the doctrine of the atonement since the second half of the nineteenth century.

However, these critiques noted, as suggested at the outset of this section, nothing detracts from the seminal status and influence Aulén's book has had in the area of classifications and understandings of the different atonement models. An influence which the British evangelical scholar Stephen Sykes (1997) has suggested meant that Aulén's book has 'achieved a prominence out of all proportion to its size' (6). Furthermore, one of the most significant contributions which Aulén's work has made was to highlight some of the important terminology (such as '*Christus Victor*') which has subsequently been employed by scholars in the ongoing process of the identification and classification of the various atonement models. As shall be shown in the following chapters, this terminology has been widely utilised by British evangelicals in their contemporary debates regarding the atonement.

### **(c) Juridical Atonement Models**

The one remaining interpretation of the significance of Jesus' death, in which the types of concise definitions concerning penal substitution discussed at the beginning of this section have arisen, concerns explicitly juridical interpretations of the atonement. In the context of the political and social upheaval of the Reformation period (c. sixteenth century), the Reformers seemed to have conceived of the significance of the death of Jesus with a 'new stress upon the central place of law in human society' (Fiddes 1989: 9). There was an increasing tendency for the human condition to be

understood in terms of there being law-breakers, summoned to receive condemnation at the divine bar of justice. Atonement, correspondingly, was a matter of satisfying not so much the honour of God as the demands of his Law, with Jesus punished as a substitute for guilty humankind. (9)<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> See also a discussion of the shift from an 'honour-shame' paradigm to a 'juridical' paradigm and the influence this has on the atonement theologies of the Reformers in Leon Morris (2001b: 118).

Green and Baker (2000) have noted the important shift from the feudal ‘honour-shame’ context of Anselm to a more ‘juridical or legal’ context of the Reformers. They argue that:

The shift away from feudal obligations to criminal law changed markedly the character of the satisfaction Christ provided [...]. Anselm does not present a wrathful God punishing Christ in our place; rather, Christ satisfies, or pays a debt we owe. In a criminal-justice system such as ours, however, ‘satisfaction’ has to do with the apprehension and punishment of the guilty. Therefore, in this context, Christ does not pay a debt humans owe to God but rather bears the punishment of God against human sin. This shift in legal framework signals the main differences between Anselm’s satisfaction model and the penal substitution model. This shift is evident already in Luther and Calvin. (142)

As will be discussed, ‘shift’ is perhaps the concept that needs to be emphasised most with respect to the atonement theologies of both Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-64). For while both theologians make reference to the significance of the death of Jesus within juridical contexts, these are by no means the only atonement images they employ. Concerning Luther for instance, we have already noted the way Gustaf Aulén sought to stress his belief that Luther subscribed to a *Christus Victor* model. In his *Lectures on Galatians* ([1535] 1963) however, Luther also embraced Anselm-like notions of ‘satisfaction’ (George 2004: 273). There are also examples which can be located in Luther’s *Large Catechism* ([1529] 1959) where he combines cosmic victory and mercantile notions. For example where he argues

[Jesus] has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all evil [...]. He has snatched us, poor lost creatures, from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored us to the Father’s favour and grace [...] he suffered, died, and was buried that he might make satisfaction for me and pay for what I owed, not with silver and gold, but with his own precious blood. (414)

Thus Timothy George (2004) concludes that ‘Luther’s thought does not lend itself to any one “theory” of atonement but encompasses the biblical truths found in both the classic [*Christus Victor*] and Latin [Anselm satisfaction] types’ (277).

A similar situation can be found in the writings of John Calvin. Again, while he certainly employed juridical atonement images, these were not unique. In the following extract from his *Institutes* (1559-60) for example, Calvin employs sacrificial, juridical and satisfaction images to explain the significance of Jesus’ death

as a Mediator, free from all taint, he may by his own holiness procure the favour of God for us. But because a deserved curse obstructs the entrance, and God in his character of Judge is hostile to us, expiation must necessarily intervene, that as a priest employed to appease the wrath of God, he may reinstate us in his favour. Wherefore, in order that Christ might fulfil this office, it behoved him to appear with a sacrifice [...]. God could not be propitiated without the expiation of sin [...] by the sacrifice of his death, he wiped away our guilt, and made satisfaction for sin. (2.15.6)

A similar usage of a whole variety of different atonement images can be identified elsewhere in his *Institutes* when Calvin discusses how

[humanity] was estranged from God by sin, an heir of wrath, exposed to the curse of eternal death, excluded from all hope of salvation, a complete alien from the blessing of God, the slave of Satan, captive under the yoke of sin; in fine, doomed to horrible destruction, and already involved in it; that then Christ interposed, took the punishment upon himself and bore what by the just judgment of God was impending over sinners; with his own blood expiated the sins which rendered them hateful to God, by this expiation satisfied and duly propitiated God the Father, by this intercession appeased his anger, on this basis founded peace between God and men, and by this tie secured the Divine benevolence toward them [...]. (2.16.2)

Thus in the examples which have been identified from the writings of Luther and Calvin, while juridical atonement images can be located (and in some writings they are perhaps the most dominant) they are by no means the only images employed. While

the process had definitely begun, the tight penal substitutionary definitions discussed at the beginning of this chapter had yet to emerge. As will be considered in the next chapter, a similar situation of embracing a variety of atonement models is typical of the first period of British evangelicalism during the eighteenth century. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century that we begin to see the promotion by some British evangelicals of tightly defined penal substitutionary formulae over and above other atonement models.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to address the task of clarifying what is meant by terms such as atonement and the different models of the atonement, including juridical approaches such as penal substitution. Consideration was made concerning how, in a broader sense, atonement is synonymous with reconciliation and relates to the general notion of the reunion between God and humanity brought about by the advent of Jesus Christ. An examination was also made of how, in a narrower sense, atonement focuses more specifically upon the death of Jesus as atoning, or making up, for human sin and its consequences. The debates which have subsequently occurred, and which continue to occur, among evangelical scholars concerning a proper understanding of key New Testament atonement concepts were also touched upon.

The second half of the chapter focused specifically on the concept of penal substitution. Consideration was given to the different atonement images to be found in the New Testament. Then, with reference in particular to the work of Gustaf Aulén, an examination was conducted of some of the different models of the atonement which



have been developed within the context of particular historical settings and in response to particular and historically situated understandings of the human condition, the estrangement between God and humankind.

The chapter concluded with an identification of the historical and cultural circumstances within which specifically juridical understandings of the atonement and, in particular, penal substitution emerged as a cognitive way of making sense of the death of Jesus. Having now considered these key concepts, the next chapter will move to a consideration of how British evangelicals as a whole, and also various groups within British evangelicalism, have used the doctrine of the atonement and atonement models in the construction of their collective identity.

### **Chapter 3 – The Atonement and Penal Substitution within British Evangelical Identity c. 1730 to c. 2000**

The previous chapter explored some of the key theological concepts that accompany crucicentrism, in particular, the doctrine of the atonement and atonement models, including penal substitution. Atonement was considered in the broader sense of reconciliation and the general notion of the reunion (the at-one-ment) between God and humanity brought about by the advent of Jesus Christ. Atonement was also considered in the narrower sense of specifically focusing upon the death of Jesus as atoning, or making up, for human sin and its consequences.

Consideration was also made of the concept of penal substitution and how conservative evangelical scholars, such as J.I. Packer (1974), have noted that penal substitution has two basic aspects. Firstly, the proposition that Jesus' death was vicarious or 'substitutionary'. Secondly, that Jesus' substitutionary death is qualified or anchored in a juridical framework of justice and penalty. An examination was also made of some of the other atonement models which have been developed over time based on New Testament images surrounding and indicating the significance of the death of Jesus.

Building upon this work, this present chapter will now examine how the doctrine of the atonement, and various models of the atonement, including penal substitution, have functioned as key theological identity-marker doctrines for British evangelicals during the period c. 1730 to c. 2000. The end point of this historical analysis is the decade of the recent controversy which is the focus of subsequent chapters. One of the motivations for this historical examination stems from Nancy

Ammerman's (2003) conclusion, which was considered in Chapter 1, that identity is suitably understood as a process of narrative construction. Thus in order to appreciate the contemporary use and contestation of identity markers used by British evangelicals, such as penal substitution, an awareness of the outline of the preceding historical narrative concerning the use of such concepts is required.

The method employed in this chapter to achieve this will be to consider a sample of the atonement theologies articulated by significant evangelical figures and organisations which have been identified as paradigmatic by scholars of British evangelical history including: David Bebbington (1989), Roger Olson (2005), Stephen Holmes (2008), Stephen Long (2007), Derek Tidball (1994), David Hilborn (1997) and Timothy Larsen (2007). The sampling and analysis of key evangelical atonement theologies will be conducted generally within a framework of five historical periods of British evangelical development between c.1730-c. 2000. This framework is provided by the work of Stephen Holmes (2008) in his essay 'Ransomed, Healed, Restored, Forgiven: Evangelical Accounts of the Atonement'.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Holmes' (2008) essay specifically focuses upon the historical place of the atonement and atonement models within British evangelicalism. It is also relevant to the subject matter considered in this thesis due to the fact that Holmes' essay was presented at the July 2005 Atonement Symposium convened by the Evangelical Alliance (UK) and the London School of Theology in response to the ongoing controversy among British evangelicals as a result of the publication of Steve Chalke and Alan Mann's book *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003). The primary focus of the survey undertaken here though will be upon the contributions made by British evangelical writers and theologians. As was discussed in Chapter 1 however, there have been important transatlantic connections and interactions between English-speaking evangelicals in Britain and North America and thus some relevant influential North American evangelical theologians (for example, the Princeton Theological Seminary theologians Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield) and their contributions to understanding this important aspect of evangelical identity will also be considered.

### 3.1 The Period c. 1730–1800

David Bebbington (1989) nominates the 1730s as the birth of what has become known as evangelical Christianity in Great Britain (20).<sup>68</sup> During this founding period of British evangelicalism, three figures are often cited as being of particular significance. The first is John Wesley (1703-1791)<sup>69</sup> who was the founder of Methodism.<sup>70</sup> Concerning Wesley's atonement theology, in his sermons, substitutionary and juridical understandings of the atonement can certainly be located. For example, in his sermon entitled 'Salvation by Faith' ([1738] 1984), Wesley said 'salvation [...] implies a deliverance from guilt and punishment, by the atonement of Christ actually applied to the soul of the sinner' (124). Furthermore in his sermon 'Justification by Faith' ([1746] 1984) he also talked of how 'by the offence of one [Adam] judgement came upon all men [sic]', yet as a result of 'his well-beloved Son, of which he hath done and suffered for us, God now vouchsafes [...] both to remit the punishment due to our sins [and] to reinstate us in his favour' (186). In the very same sermon however, Wesley also utilised a whole variety of alternative atonement images. This includes ransom images: 'Plead thou singly the blood of the covenant, the ransom paid for thy proud, stubborn, sinful soul' (199). Quoting language from the liturgy of the Lord's Supper in the

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<sup>68</sup> Stephen Holmes (2008) agrees with this dating for the commencement of British evangelicalism. Other scholars though have advocated an earlier dating. Michael Haykin (2008: 52ff), for example, has sought to emphasise the 'great deal of continuity between Puritanism and evangelicalism' (60). A.T.B. McGowan (2008) also asserts that in a Scottish context 'there is an unbroken line of evangelicalism from John Knox (c. 1514-72) to William Cunningham (1805-61)' (63). For Bebbington's response to these alternate positions see Bebbington (2008).

<sup>69</sup> R.G. Tuttle (2001) describes John Wesley as the 'primary figure in the eighteenth-century Evangelistic Revival' (1266).

<sup>70</sup> The Methodists remained a group within the established Church of England during Wesley's lifetime only finally becoming a separate denomination from the Church of England in 1797 (Tuttle 2001: 1266; Mickey 2001: 768). P.A. Mickey (2001) described Methodism as a 'name designating several Protestant groups, Methodism has its roots in the work of John and Charles Wesley. [...] A friend and Oxford classmate of the Wesleys, George Whitefield, was also instrumental in forming the Holy Club (c. 1725) which stressed "inward religion, the religion of the heart." These awakenings, coupled with the club's insistence on exacting discipline in scholastic as well as spiritual matters, earned its members the jeering title of Methodists by 1729' (767).

Church of England *Book of Common Prayer*, he also adopted atonement images of sacrifice, satisfaction, redemption and recapitulation:

He [Jesus] made his soul an offering for sin.' He 'bare [sic] our sins in his own body on the tree' [...]. 'And by that one oblation of himself once offered' he 'hath redeemed me and all mankind' [sic]; having thereby 'made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world'. [...] Even so by the sacrifice for sin made by the second Adam, as the representative for all of us, God is so far reconciled to all the world that he hath given them a new covenant. (186-87)

This trend of using a variety of atonement images continued in Wesley's work, *The Principles of a Methodist* ([1742] 1989). In this he represented in juridical terms Jesus' death as achieving 'the satisfaction of God's justice by offering his body and shedding his blood' (51). Yet on the same page, he also referred to the significance of Jesus' death in terms of ransom:

For whereas all the world was not able to pay any part towards their ransom it pleased him, without any of our deserving, to prepare for us Christ's body and blood, whereby our ransom might be paid, 'his law fulfilled, and his justice satisfied' [...] 'He for them paid the ransom by his death...'. (51)

This phenomenon continued in the work edited by John Wesley ([1780] 1983) entitled *A Collection of Hymns, For The Use of the People Called Methodists*.<sup>71</sup> In Hymn 123 for example, while containing a sacrificial image of Jesus as the Lamb of God, the language of justice and punishment permeates the hymn as do images of Jesus standing in punishment for the worshipper singing these lines expressed emphatically in Verse 7:

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<sup>71</sup> Stephen Holmes (2008) maintains that John Wesley's younger brother Charles Wesley (1707-88) is regarded as having made a significant contribution to this work (269).

6. Guilty I stand before thy face,  
On me I feel thy wrath abide;  
'Tis just the sentence should take place,  
'Tis just – but Oh! thy Son hath died!

7. Jesus, the Lamb of God hath bled,  
He bore our sins upon the Tree!  
Beneath our curse he bowed his head:  
'Tis finished! He hath died for me.

8. For me I now believe he died;  
He made my every crime his own;  
Fully for me he satisfied; Father,  
well-pleased behold thy Son! (Wesley [1780] 1983: 234)

However in the section of hymns in this book entitled *For Believers Saved* there are again numerous other atonement images which can be identified including: ransom (Hymns 406, 411 and 414), sacrifice (Hymn 415) and cosmic victory (Hymns 407 and 427) (Wesley [1780] 1983: 582ff).

The second person often associated with this initial period of British evangelicalism is John Wesley's Oxford University and subsequent ministry colleague, George Whitefield (1714-1770).<sup>72</sup> In his Sermon entitled *Of Justification by Christ* (1771-1772a), Whitefield employed an expressly penal and juridical understanding of the human predicament

he [God] hath also given us both a natural and a written law, whereby we are to be judged [...] and that each of us hath broken these laws, is too evident from our sad and frequent experience [...]. And if we are thus offenders against God, it follows, that we stand in need of forgiveness for thus offending Him; [...] he demands our obedience to that law, and has obliged us universally and perseveringly to obey it, under no less a penalty than incurring his curse and eternal death for every breach of it [...] unless some means can be found to satisfy God's justice, we must perish eternally. (Whitefield 1771-1772a)

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<sup>72</sup> Mark Noll (2001a) has described George Whitefield as the 'best-known evangelist of the eighteenth century and one of the greatest itinerant preachers in the history of Protestantism' (1273).

Later in this sermon, when discussing the effect of Jesus' death, he also emphasised the substitutionary character of Jesus' atoning work within a broadly juridical framework along with an accompanying reference to ransom: 'because nothing but an infinite ransom could satisfy an infinitely offended justice, [God] should send his only and dear Son Jesus Christ [...] [to] die a cursed, painful, ignominious death, for us and for our salvation! (Whitefield 1771-1772a). In his sermon entitled *The Power of Christ's Resurrection*, Whitefield combines together various atonement images (including: redemption, *Christus Victor* and sacrifice) when explaining the substitutionary significance of Jesus' death:

It had pleased the Father [...] to wound his only Son for our transgressions, and to arrest and confine him in the prison of the grave, as our surety for the guilt we had contracted by setting at nought his commandments. Now had Christ continued always in the grave, we could have had no more assurance that our sins were satisfied for, than any common debtor can have of his creditor's being satisfied, whilst his surety is kept confined. But he being released from the power of death, we are thereby assured, that with his sacrifice God was well pleased, that our atonement was finished on the cross, and that he hath made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the world. (Whitefield 1771-1772b)

The third prominent evangelical of this period was the Massachusetts Congregationalist Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758).<sup>73</sup> In some of Edwards' early sermons, he also employed a variety of images to understand the significance of the atoning work of Christ. In his sermon *God Glorified In Man's Dependence* ([1731] 1999), he preached about the substitutionary nature of Christ's death anchored in a combination of mercantile and juridical understandings:

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<sup>73</sup> Concerning the corpus of his theological work, Mark Noll (2001b) commented that Edwards 'produced one of the most thorough and compelling bodies of theological writing in the history of America' (366). Though not a British evangelical, Edwards did have direct ministry associations with British evangelicals of this period, such as George Whitefield (Gordon 1991: 41).

'Tis of God that we actually do receive all the benefits that Christ has purchased. 'Tis God that pardons and justifies and delivers from going down to hell, and 'tis his favour that the redeemed are received into, and are made the objects of, when they are justified. (202-3)<sup>74</sup>

Further and more specific emphasis is placed upon a penal substitutionary understanding of Jesus' death in his famous sermon entitled *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* ([1741] 2003). Here Edwards employed vividly juridical language to characterise the human predicament, passionately stressing that humans

deserve to be cast into hell; so that divine justice never stands in the way [...] justice calls aloud for an infinite punishment of their sins [...]. They are already under a sentence of condemnation to hell. They don't only justly deserve to be cast down thither; but the sentence of the law of God, that eternal and immutable rule of righteousness that God has fixed between him and mankind [sic], is gone out against them, and stands against them; so that they are bound over already to hell. (405-406)

However, as George Marsden (2003) has noted, the motif of Christ's cosmic victory over Satan is also extremely significant in Edwards' theology (194). Thus in 'Sermon Thirty' Edwards ([1744] 1989) explained by use of battleground imagery that:

God glorifies his strength in the church's weakness in making his people, that are like a number of little infants, finally to triumph over all earth and hell, so that they shall tread on the lion and adder. The glorious power of God appears in conquering his many and mighty enemies by that person that once [was] an infant in a manger, and appeared as a poor, weak, despised man. He conquers them and triumphs over them in their own weapon, the cross of Christ. (305)

Thus with respect to the first period of the founding fathers of British evangelicalism, the work of these three seminal figures in British and North American

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<sup>74</sup> Later in this sermon Edwards adds in the theme of sacrifice: 'Yea, God is both the purchaser and the price; for Christ, who is God, purchased these blessings for us, by offering up himself as the price of our salvation. He purchased eternal life by the sacrifice of himself [...] "He offered up himself" and [...] He hath appeared to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself' (Edwards [1731] 1999: 207).



evangelicalism supports the conclusion that they unanimously conceived of Christ's atoning work in substitutionary terms. However concerning how this substitutionary atonement is to be anchored, while juridical and penal substitutionary terms can definitely be identified, these were by no means unique. Other atonement theologies and metaphors were also utilised, often in combination. The use of juridical images by these three founding evangelicals also seemed completely uncontroversial (Holmes 2008: 270) and they appeared to move naturally and fluidly between different atonement images within the same writings.<sup>75</sup>

### 3.2 The Period 1800-1845

During the earlier years of this second period, one of the most famous British evangelicals was William Wilberforce (1759-1833).<sup>76</sup> Wilberforce reflected the trend

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<sup>75</sup> Another British example which could have been presented here which further supports these three conclusions is the Baptist minister Andrew Fuller (1754-1815). On occasions, Fuller (1811) advocated a penal substitutionary view, speaking in terms that suggested Christ's sufferings 'were a punishment, and he sustained it, yet were really and properly the punishment of our sins, and not his [...]. He was made a curse for us: that is, having been reckoned, or accounted the sinner, as though he had actually been so, he was treated accordingly, as one that had deserved to be an outcast from heaven and earth. I believe the wrath of God that was due to us was poured on him' (153-4). Yet at other times, Fuller also embraced a more governmental theory of the atonement which conceived of Jesus' death as an outworking of 'the moral government of God' (180) and as part of 'the divine administration' (150). David Bebbington (2010) explained that pursuant to the governmental theory of the atonement, 'The Almighty [...] was bound to uphold his authority by requiring a public demonstration of the awfulness of sin. God was presented as a ruler who might have permitted sin [...] by simply pardoning offences, but that policy would not have created fear in wrongdoers. Public order had to be maintained in the universe as well as in the state' (8). Jesus' death was therefore not so much a bearing of our punishment than it was a suffering as a penal example which honoured the law while providing a pardon for sinners. As ruler, God has established the law and sin constitutes an offence against this law and so warrants death. However, God has effectively relaxed this law, not condemning sinners to death, but accepting Jesus' death instead (Morris 2001b: 118; Bloesch 2010: 226). In addition, Jesus' death also provides an ongoing value in the governmental ordering of creation in that it serves as 'a public example of the sin and the lengths to which God would go to uphold the moral order of the universe' (Morris 2001b: 118).

<sup>76</sup> As well being as a prominent philanthropist and abolitionist, Wilberforce was also a member of the Clapham Sect and one of the leaders of the Evangelical Party (Livingstone 2006: 636). Wilberforce also assisted in the foundation of the Church Mission Society in 1799 and the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804 (Livingstone 2006: 83, 130 & 636). The Clapham Sect was an 'informal group of wealthy Anglican Evangelicals, many of whom lived near Clapham and worshiped in the Parish Church [...] They supported the campaign against the slave-trade, extension of missionary enterprise [...] the

of the first period of British evangelicalism of affirming the substitutionary character of Jesus' death while anchoring this in a variety of atonement images including satisfaction and mercantile images,<sup>77</sup> together with expressly juridical and penal substitutionary language. This is evident for example when he discussed 'the guilt of sin; and how [...] rather than sin should go unpunished, "God spared not his own Son," but "was pleased to bruise him and put him to grief" for our sakes' (Wilberforce [1829] 2005: 259).

The second person to be considered during this period is John McLeod Campbell (1800-1872). He was originally a Church of Scotland minister before being deposed from the ministry by the General Assembly in 1831 for his stated positions on matters relating to salvation and universal atonement (Douglas 2001: 205).<sup>78</sup> In his book *The Nature of the Atonement and its Relation to the Remission of Sins and Eternal Life* ([1855-6] 1906), McLeod Campbell expressly rejected understanding the sufferings of Jesus on the Cross as being 'penal sufferings endured in meeting a demand of divine justice [...]. We cannot conceive of the Son of God as enduring a penal infliction in the very act of honouring His father' (114-115).<sup>79</sup> He did not deny that 'the wrath of God against sin is a reality, however men [sic] have erred in their

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establishment of a model colony in Sierra Leone, and the extension of Sunday Schools' (Livingstone 2006: 126).

<sup>77</sup> For example, Wilberforce writes of 'the death of Christ as the satisfaction for our sins, and for the purchase of our future happiness' (Wilberforce [1829] 2005: 105).

<sup>78</sup> W.A. Elwell (2001) explains that universal atonement or general redemption maintains that 'the death of Christ was designed to include all humankind, regardless whether all believe. To those who savingly believe it is redemptively applied, and to those who do not believe it provides the benefits of common grace and the removal of any excuse for being lost' (115). In contrast, limited atonement or particular redemption is the 'doctrine that Jesus dies for the elect in particular, securing their redemption, but not for the world, [which] arose as the implications of the doctrine of election [...]' (Elwell 2001: 115). However, as Thomas F. Torrance (1996) cautions, 'By "universal atonement" [...] McLeod Campbell meant that Christ died for all people, not that all people would actually be saved' (288).

<sup>79</sup> James Torrance (1986) notes that McLeod Campbell was critical of 'the federal (covenant) scheme, [whereby] law is thus prior to grace. God is related to all humankind by "the covenant of works (law)" and only to some by "the covenant of grace" in redemption. Hence atonement was construed in terms of the view that God would only be gracious if law was satisfied and sin punished, that is, by Christ fulfilling for the elect the conditions of the covenant of works (law). McLeod Campbell saw that this inverted the Biblical order, that grace is prior to law, that "the filial is prior to the judicial"' (7).

thoughts as to how that wrath was to be appeased' (116). McLeod Campbell proposed that Christ's 'oneness of mind with the Father, which towards man took the form of condemnation of sin, would in the Son's dealings with the Father [...] take the form of a perfect confession of sins' (116-7). Consequently in his death on the Cross, Jesus

responds to the great wrath against sin, saying, 'Thou art righteous, O Lord, who judgest so,' is necessarily receiving the full apprehension and realisation of that wrath, as well as that sin against which it comes forth into His soul and spirit, into the bosom of the divine humanity, and, so receiving it, He responds to it with a perfect response [...] and in that perfect response He absorbs it. For that response has all the elements of a perfect repentance in humanity for all the sin of man, – a perfect sorrow – a perfect contrition [...] and by that perfect response in Amen to the mind of God in relation to sin is the wrath of God rightly met.' (117-118)

Accordingly, it would appear that for McLeod Campbell, rather than being understood in terms of penal substitution, Jesus' death is conceived of as vicariously responding on behalf of humanity with the perfect confession and penitence for human sin.<sup>80</sup>

In his book *True and False Religion* (1874) Scottish theologian Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788-1870) was similarly at pains to identify and condemn what he regarded as 'selfish religion'. Such religion had as its object the individual trying to avert the danger of incurring God's wrath by obtaining forgiveness rather than a confident, earnest and faithful service to the glorification of God (2-3).<sup>81</sup> This position led Erskine to be critical of conceiving of the human condition and the response of God

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<sup>80</sup> This was certainly the interpretation of some of McLeod Campbell's critics. Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield ([1902] 1988) described McLeod Campbell's view as one of 'sympathetic identification and repentance' whereby 'Christ so fully enters sympathetically into our case [...] that He is able to offer an adequate repentance for our sins, and the Father says, "It is enough!"' (290-291). John Stott ([1986] 2006) concluded that pursuant to McLeod Campbell's approach "sin bearing" has dissolved into sympathy, "satisfaction" into sorrow for sin, and "substitution" into vicarious penitence, instead of vicarious punishment' (167).

<sup>81</sup> Geoffrey Rowell (1974) affirms that 'For Erskine [...] such men [sic] were not really concerned with God at all; they were merely anxious about what could be obtained through him, the escape from penalties' (72).

to sin in a manner that atonement theologies such as penal substitution essentially require. He argues that

obedience of man's [sic] religion is a mere outward thing, paid as a price to obtain a reward or to avert a punishment. It proves that according to man's religion, God's government is regarded as a mere system or police for keeping the world in order by operating on their selfish feelings. One great mistake into which man falls in the matter of religion, is that he thinks that obedience to the law is the way by which he is to arrive at a farther blessing, – whereas, according to God's religion, obedience is itself the ultimate blessing. Love which is the only true obedience to the law, is the only right and blessed state of the creature. It is from this mistake, that much error as to the nature of the gospel proceeds. (37)<sup>82</sup>

Geoffrey Rowell (1974) therefore concluded that for Erskine:

Everywhere, he [Erskine] wrote that salvation from punishment was substituted for salvation from sin, and sin itself was conceived as a series of particular offences, rather than as the state of man's [sic] alienation from God [...]. For Erskine the righteousness of God was not a righteousness external to men, the contentious and scrupulous fairness of a judge, but it was a righteousness that desired to communicate itself. (72-73)

During this period, Church of Scotland minister Edward Irving (1792-1834) was also highly critical of atonement theologies that conceived of Christ's saving work in terms of 'so much suffering in His person, instead of so much suffering in ours' (Irving [1828] 1865: 146). Irving observed concerning such atonement theologies:

Besides being illogical, how degrading is it to represent the great mystery as shut up in this, that the Father would have so much punishment, get it where He could, and so He took it out of His own Son! (147)

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<sup>82</sup> Confirming this interpretation and the implication Erskine's position has for his view on substitutionary-type atonement theologies, Rowell (1974) records how, 'In 1865 he [Erskine] told Alexander Ewing, the Bishop of Argyll and the Isles, that false concepts of salvation were at the root of the substitutionary view of the Atonement. In Erskine's view the life and death of Christ were "the acting of the root of the human tree, by which the sap is prepared for and propelled into the branches"' (73 n39).

Irving instead focuses upon the salvific significance of the Incarnation combined with what he regarded as the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit for believers which has the effect of mysteriously ‘mixing’ them into a participation in Christ’s immortal and eternal glory (151).<sup>83</sup>

Concerning this second period of British evangelicalism, while William Wilberforce essentially continued the position of the previous period, in the subsequent atonement theologies of John McLeod Campbell, Thomas Erskine and Edward Irving, we can locate the emergence of the first generation of British evangelicals who were openly critical of juridical atonement expressions, such as penal substitution, and who sought to promote atonement theologies which did not have recourse to a juridical paradigm (Holmes 2008: 271-3). Further, in the case of Erskine and Irving, they also would appear to reject the very notion of conceiving of Jesus’ death as being substitutionary in nature.

Concerning the intriguing question as to *why* this significant departure from the previous period of British evangelicalism emerged at this particular time, Stephen Holmes (2008) proposes that the criticism of penal substitution among some British evangelicals during this period reflected and coincided with broader cultural change in

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<sup>83</sup> Irving ([1828] 1865) therefore asserts that in the act of Incarnation: ‘which united His [Jesus’] body, that was mortal and corruptible, unto His immortal part, consisting of soul and Second Person of the Godhead, and fixed it there in immortal union for ever and ever [...] though He be, as it were, united unto all flesh, by virtue of what He did in flesh; yet only so much of it as the Father by the Holy Ghost regenerated shall be brought up in the fashion of His glory, and the rest shall be brought up in the fashion of the mere and unmixed sinful creature, to inherit for ever the estate of the second death’ (151). This extract concerning Irving’s atonement theology would seem to accord with Ian Rennie’s (2001) conclusion that Irving ‘sought to get back behind the anti-charismatic stance of the Protestant Reformation and reintroduce the charismatic dimension to Protestantism [...] [Irving] developed a charismatic Christology in which he taught that in the incarnation Jesus Christ received a fallen human nature, but that the activity of the Spirit kept him from sin. Such views created much opposition in the Church of Scotland [...] [he was] barred from his pulpit by the presbytery, and subsequently deposed by the Church of Scotland General Assembly [in 1833]’ (Rennie 2001: 617-8). For a further discussion of the circumstances which led to Irving’s deposition from the Church of Scotland see Ralph Brown (2007: 677-83).

Europe concerning state penal and justice policy which was developing at the same time. Holmes suggests that with

the shifting centre of gravity of European visions of criminal justice between 1750 and 1820 [...] someone who accepted the earlier tradition of criminal justice, centred as it was on the public infliction of violence, would find it culturally easier to interpret the cross in terms of Jesus' bearing the punishment that was our due than someone who had been taught by cultural shifts to regard the earlier vision as barbaric [...]. [T]he rhetoric justifying the earlier exercise of power was a rhetoric of desert and punishment; the rhetoric justifying the birth of the prison is a rhetoric of delinquency and rehabilitation. (274-5)<sup>84</sup>

There is evidence to support Holmes' assertions regarding corresponding cultural changes in Europe concerning penal and justice policy with some changes in positions upon atonement theology. Michel Foucault's (1977) influential book, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, traces the significant transformations in criminal justice and penal style which began in Europe and North America in the second half eighteenth century. These changes culminated in 'the disappearance of torture as a public spectacle' (7). Criminologists, such as John Tierney (2009), have also noted the emergence in Europe of what is termed 'classical criminology' or 'classicism' during the eighteenth century (Tierney 2009: 42; Muncie 2001: 168; Morrison 1995: 8). Tierney maintains that the emergence of classical criminology 'reflected the philosophical and political thought associated with the Enlightenment, the "Age of Reason"' (42). He argues that:

The most influential figure in eighteenth-century classical criminology was the Italian Cesare Beccaria [...]. In 1764 he published *An essay On Crimes*

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<sup>84</sup> David Bebbington (1989) has also similarly observed that, 'By the 1870s, however, the fear was expressed that substitution was being discarded. [...] The humanitarian tone of public opinion was veering against this understanding of the death of Christ. George Bernard Shaw voiced the newer attitude in characteristically searing fashion. "I detest the doctrine of the Atonement", he once wrote, "holding that ladies and gentlemen cannot as such possibly allow anyone else to expiate their sins by suffering a cruel death."' (16).

*and Punishments*, which had an enormous impact on Enlightenment thinkers across Europe and North America. [...] Beccaria was highly critical of the system of justice in operation in Europe at that time, a system that reflected its origins in feudal society. It was attacked for being arbitrary, corrupt, barbaric and, in particular, inefficient – the latter especially offended utilitarian principles – it was, therefore, not rational. (45)<sup>85</sup>

The British Baptist Andrew Fuller (1833) provides an example of the impact of this utilitarian type of thinking when he asserted that: ‘The end of punishment is not the misery of the offender, but the general good’ (807). Concerning the impact of a more utilitarian penal policy on Fuller’s atonement theology, David Bebbington (2010) concluded:

Fuller was moving, with the general drift of Enlightenment thought, towards seeing punishment less as retribution than as deterrence [...]. Fuller’s case for a governmental understanding of the cross was cast in terms readily understood by his enlightened contemporaries. (9)<sup>86</sup>

### 3.3 The Period 1845-1920

In 1846 the Evangelical Alliance (UK) (hereafter EA) was formed. The EA describes itself as having ‘inherited and developed the pan-evangelical spirit of the Wesley-Whitefield revival of the 1730s’ (EA 2010). At its formation, the EA adopted a doctrinal *Basis of Faith*.<sup>87</sup> With respect to the doctrine of the atonement, this Basis of

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<sup>85</sup> Utilitarianism generally embraced the view that ‘people and social institutions should be useful and make a positive contribution to the well-being of society – “the greatest good for the greatest number”. From this perspective, the *ancien Régime* [the old system of order and government based upon an absolute monarch, an aristocracy and the Church] was not useful’ (Tierney 2009: 42). The transformation which had taken place in penal policy in Great Britain by the mid nineteenth century included a shift ‘from forms of punishment aimed at the “body” (physical pain) to forms of punishment aimed at the “mind” (isolation, penitence)’ (Muncie 2001: 166).

<sup>86</sup> Discussion of a governmental understanding of the atonement is discussed previously in this chapter at footnote 75.

<sup>87</sup> This was originally referred to as the ‘Doctrinal Basis of the World’s Evangelical Alliance (1846)’ (Warner 2006: 308).

Faith simply affirmed a basic affirmation of Jesus' 'work of atonement for the sinners of mankind [sic]' (Hilborn 2008: 15), without specifying any particular anchor or controlling paradigm (or group of paradigms) within which Jesus' atoning work should be conceptually located. This interpretation of the broad nature of the original EA *Basis of Faith* is confirmed by the former Head of Theology of the EA, David Hilborn (2008), who concluded that 'the many disputes about the atonement which had developed between that point [1846] and the late 1960s prompted the EA executive council to tighten up its language on the cross [in its *Basis of Faith*]' (Hilborn 2008: 23). Accordingly, in the 1970 EA *Basis of Faith*, an expanded reference was made to:

The substitutionary sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God as the sole all-sufficient ground of redemption from the guilt and power of sin, and from its eternal consequences. (15)

While this statement provides an express affirmation of the 'substitutionary' character of Jesus' death, it would appear on the face of it, to continue the tradition of the first period of British evangelicalism; it promotes a substitutionary view, but this is anchored in a variety of atonement images including: cultic ('sacrifice'); mercantile/ransom ('redemption from the [...] power of sin'); and juridical ('guilt') paradigms. Of note is the fact that expressly penal substitutionary language, such as 'penal', 'penalty' and 'punishment', remain absent. Intriguingly however, as shall be consider in the following chapter, a press statement released by the EA in November 2004, in the context of the recent controversy, maintains that the EA board and senior theological advisors were nonetheless firmly of the view that concerning this 1970 EA *Basis of Faith* statement

the executive council which approved the Basis in 1970 took it as entailing and implying penal substitution. It [the press statement] emphasised that its affirmations of universal human sin and guilt, divine wrath and condemnation,



and the substitutionary, sacrificial and redemptive nature of Christ's death taken together comprised the key elements of penal substitution. (Hilborn 2008: 21-22)<sup>88</sup>

Notwithstanding the questionability of this assertion in light of the actual wording that is used in the Basis of Faith (1970), the latest 2005 version of the EA *Basis of Faith* continues the practice of omitting expressly penal language by referring to: 'The atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross: dying in our place, paying the price of sin and defeating evil, so reconciling us with God' (15). However Hilborn (2008) himself continues to maintain that this 2005 wording nonetheless carries 'the implication of penal substitutionary sacrifice which the EA council of 1970 had so clearly inferred from the earlier text' (27).<sup>89</sup>

During this third period of evangelical development, English Baptist minister Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) came to prominence. Spurgeon was renowned for his preaching and ministry centred in London at locations including the famous Metropolitan Tabernacle at Elephant and Castle (Johnson 2001: 1146). In a collection of his college lectures, church addresses and sermons published under the title *The Soul Winner or, How to Lead Sinners to the Saviour* ([c.1895] 2008), Spurgeon affirmed a substitutionary understanding of the atoning work of Christ. Concerning Spurgeon's preferred atonement anchor(s), David Bebbington (2010), for example, maintains the view that Spurgeon predominantly adhered to a juridical and penal substitutionary position (12). However the evidence which can be identified in *The Soul Winner* suggests that by virtue of the language which Spurgeon employed, he

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<sup>88</sup> In his interview, EA Vice President, Derek Tidball, similarly maintained that he is of the opinion that the authors of the 1970 wording would have assumed that it entailed penal substitution.

<sup>89</sup> In his interview, David Hilborn appeared to soften his view on the extent to which the 1970 EA wording affirmed penal substitution. He suggested that the omission of the word 'penalty' from the relevant atonement clause may be 'an indicator of the uneasiness in a pan-evangelical context with nailing the penal language to the mast'.

appears more accurately to have continued the tradition from the first period of British evangelicalism of affirming a variety of atonement anchors. For example, Spurgeon does indeed employ expressly juridical and penal substitutionary language when he writes:

The way to be saved is to simply trust in what the Son of man did when he became man, and suffered punishment for all those who trust Him. For all His people, Christ was a Substitute [...]. He was punished for your sins; and you cannot be punished for them, for God cannot punish sin twice, first in Christ, and then in you. (180)

On other occasions however the evidence suggests that Spurgeon seemed to be at complete liberty to employ alternative atonement images without any connection to juridical or penal understandings. Thus we find Spurgeon talking in terms of the atoning work of Christ as being a sacrifice – ‘you preach Christ, and his wounds; yea, and the clear doctrine of atonement by sacrifice’ (16 and also 25, 132); in terms of expiation – ‘The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin’ (104); in cosmic and *Christus Victor* type terms – ‘the mighty power which God wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly place far above all principality and power’ (122); and ransom – ‘Think of the Saviour’s agony in the ransom of every one of His redeemed’ (148).

Bebbington (2010) further maintains that one of the other influences during this period was Romanticism. He explained that:

The rise of Romantic taste during the nineteenth century affected the whole intellectual mood. The older categories of the Enlightenment, its firm analytical divisions, its belief in empirical method and its admiration for public affairs, steadily, gave way to more diffuse ways of thinking, a delight in imaginative avenues to truth and an idealisation of the home. Although the advance of Romanticism was gradual, it represented a fundamental reorientation in habits of conceptualising the world that could not fail to

impinge on theology. (13-14)

Bebbington asserts that Romanticism influenced the atonement theologies of some British evangelicals during this period away from some of the harder legal edges of, for example, penal substitution, in favour of a milder emphasis upon the love of God, moral influence and the connection between the death of Jesus and the Incarnation (14). One of the clearest examples of someone absorbing this Romantic way of thinking during this period was the J.G. Greenhough, president of the Baptist Union in 1895. Greenhough (1904) favoured an understanding of Jesus' death which promoted 'the spirit of love and human brotherhood [sic] which Christ has diffused abroad' (10). Further, he maintained that when interpreting Paul's references in his corpus to 'the Cross', this should not be limited to Jesus' death, but rather should embrace

all that was included in the incarnation mystery – the manifestation of God in the flesh, the spotless and holy manhood, the life of sympathy and healing, the heavenly wisdom of the teachings, the great condensation, the great love [...] they were all summed up in one word 'the cross.' (3)

However, other contemporary theologians reacted against a fluid embracing of multifarious images in discussing the significance of Jesus' death. The Congregationalist minister Robert W. Dale (1829-95) while noting that there are various images surrounding Jesus' death to be found in the New Testament (including ransom, propitiation and bearing a punishment), cautioned that it 'is not possible by any rough process of combination to work these heterogeneous illustrations of the great fact into a coherent conception of it' (Dale 1887: 356). This is because Dale maintained that the various illustrations are inconsistent:

For a good citizen to bear the punishment of a convicted criminal, is one thing; for a generous philanthropist to pay the ransom of a slave, is a different

thing; for a friend or a relative of a man who has done wrong to propitiate the anger of a powerful superior, is a different thing again. (356)

Dale's cautionary observation here is significant because, as will be discussed shortly, one of the tactics adopted by subsequent advocates of penal substitution was to assert the very thing Dale was cautioning against. Dale proposed that the focus of the atonement should stay primarily on what he regarded as the basic factual article of faith that 'the Death of Christ is conceived and described as being the objective ground on which we receive Remission of sins' (ix). It should be noted however that in his subsequent explanation of this 'fact', Dale himself employs juridical anchors such as punishment, for instance that the 'eternal Law of Righteousness declares that sin deserves to be punished' (391). Colin Gunton (1999) has noted though that Dale's juridical emphasis, while substitutionary, is not equivalent to penal substitution as this has come to be understood and which was discussed in the preceding chapter:

Dale's point is this. It is a function of the love of God to remove those factors affecting human life which render obedience to divine law impossible. This involves bearing the consequences of those breaches of obedience which have led to human incapacity to be truly human apart from the grace of redemption. What is thus removed is not a penalty conceived as a quantity, but that which blocks the human relation to God. On this understanding, the law is wholly salutary [...]. The one who does [this] under divine judgement is himself the one who exercises it. It is thus the divine judge who undergoes judgement, not a human substitute who bears a penalty equivalent to that which others merited. (8)

Scottish Free Church theologian James Denney (1856-1917) similarly affirmed the 'substitutionary' character of Christ's atoning work (Denney 1903b: 10 and 94; also Denney 1903a: 327), though he also continued the tradition of anchoring his atonement theology in a variety of images including: mercantile notions – 'cost and being bought with a price' (Denney 1903a: 286 and 319); 'ransom' (Denney 1903a:

310 and 333); juridical - ‘overcoming God’s judgement in relation to our sins’ (Denney 1903a: 317) and ‘the propitiation of sins’ (Denney 1903a: 329 and 334); and in cosmic/*Christus victor* terms – ‘to destroy the works of the devil’ (Denney 1903a: 325). Further, there are a number of occasions where Denney appeared to caution against an overly juridical understanding of the atoning work of Christ. For example, Denney (1903b) explained that:

To say that the relations of God and man [sic] are forensic is to say that they are regulated by statute – that sin is a breach of statute – that the sinner is a criminal – and that God adjudicates on him by interpreting the statute in its application to his case. Everybody knows that this is a travesty of the truth. [...] It is superfluously apparent that the relations of God and man are not those of a magistrate on the bench pronouncing according to the act on the criminal at the bar. (46-47)<sup>90</sup>

The Scottish Congregationalist theologian and teacher P.T. Forsyth (1848-1921)<sup>91</sup> accepted the substitutionary character of the significance of Jesus’ death but anchored this in terms of being a confession of God’s holiness (Bloesch 2001: 462). Forsyth ([1909] 1948) explained that:

By the atonement, therefore is meant that action of Christ’s death which has a prime regard to God’s holiness, has it for its first charge, and find’s man’s [sic] reconciliation impossible except as that holiness is divinely satisfied once for all on the cross. Such an atonement is the key to the incarnation. We must take the view of Christ which does most justice to the holiness of God [...] when Jesus died for our sins He died once for all, that He did not merely signalise in a classic way the expiation that all must dree [endure or suffer], and illustrate and cheer every man’s [sic] atonement for his own misdeeds. It

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<sup>90</sup> Denney (1903b) then proceeded to apologetically concede that: ‘When a man says – as someone said – “There are many to whom the conception of forgiveness resting on judicial transaction does not appeal at all,” I entirely agree with him; it does not appeal at all to me’ (48). Thus to the extent that there are valid juridical aspects to our understanding of the human condition and the atonement, Denney appears to have chosen to frame them more in terms of ethical and moral ordering: ‘the relations of God and man [sic] are personal, and also that they are universal, that is, there is a law of them, or, if we like to say so, a law in them, on the maintenance of which their whole ethical value depends [...] these relations are deranged and disordered by sin. Sin is, in fact, nothing else than this derangement or disturbance: it is that in which wrong is done to the moral constitution under which we live’ (54).

<sup>91</sup> Donald Bloesch (2001) described P.T. Forsyth as an ‘Evangelical theologian hailed as a modern prophet by both his admirers and critics’ (462).

is meant beyond that, first, that in the atonement we have primarily the act of God, and the act of God's holiness; second, that it alone makes any repentance or expiation of ours satisfactory to God [...]. (viii-ix)

When discussing Forsyth's atonement theology and its focus upon holiness and his rejection of popular evangelical juridical atonement theologies, Bloesch (2001) maintains that for Forsyth:

The truth of the atonement is that God himself in the person of the Son entered into our sufferings, identifying himself with our pain and anguish. Christ's confession of the holiness of the Father is the ground for forgiveness and the new life in Christ. (462)<sup>92</sup>

Another critic of penal substitution during this time was T.R. Birks (1810-83). He was brought up in a Baptist family but converted to the Church of England at the commencement of his undergraduate studies at Cambridge in 1830 (Brown 2007: 679). While he did employ juridical understandings in his atonement theology, he was nonetheless critical of juridical positions which emphasised 'the penal suffering of the just and innocent in place of the unjust' (Birks 1863: 119). Birks, echoing an argument raised by subsequent critics of penal substitution, explained that one reason for his rejection of penal substitutionary understandings of the atonement is that such thinking is erroneously premised upon belief in the validity of the transfer of guilt and punishment

punishment or reward purely and strictly retributive [...] viewed as fixed and determined, and dealt with in equity at the bar of the Almighty, is equally

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<sup>92</sup> We can see evidence supporting Bloesch's assessment in P.T. Forsyth's ([1910] 1938) work when he firstly stated that the 'real objective in atonement is not that something was offered to God, but that God made the offering' (99). Secondly, when he argues that: 'There is only one thing that can satisfy the holiness of God, and that is holiness – adequate holiness [...]. Nothing, no penalty, no passionate remorse, no verbal acknowledgement, no ritual, [...] nothing but holiness, actual holiness, and holiness upon the same scale as the one holy law which was broken [...]. We do not now speak of Christ's sufferings as being *equivalent* of what we deserved, but we speak of his confession of God's holiness, his acceptance of God's judgement, being *adequate* in a way that sin forbade any acknowledgement from us to be. For the only adequate confession of a holy God a perfectly holy man' (126).

incapable of being transferred. In this sense “every one must bear his [sic] own burden;” and the reward must be given to every one, by the King of Righteousness, “according as his work shall be.” (135)

Birks firmly believed that ‘Man [sic] is capable, in his fallen state, of being recovered to the Divine favour and image once more’ (136). The problem, however, is that a [...] creature [human being] can never raise itself to this height of moral strength and sufficiency’ (135). Therefore, the significance of Jesus’ death is that

the Son of God, by stooping from His own glory, and becoming a willing partaker of flesh and blood, can fulfil all the conditions of this hard problem; and while he magnifies the law of God in all its absolute rigour of holiness, and makes it honourable, can remove the heavy burden of His fallen creatures, and reduce the unalterable requirements of justice within a limit which the feeblest among them, unless obstinately perverse, will be able to endure. (135)<sup>93</sup>

In comparison with other popular atonement theologies among Birks’ evangelical contemporaries, Ralph Brown (2007) concluded that Birks’ atonement theology emphasised individual penitence in that his ‘interpretation of the atonement can [...] be seen to have placed a novel emphasis upon the responsibility and accountability of man [sic]’ (696-7).

In North America during this period, one of the most important contributions was made by theologians associated Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey. The Princeton theologians sought chiefly ‘to combat subjectivism, which

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<sup>93</sup>Birks emphasised a two-fold character of the atonement: ‘it was both a public declaration of God’s righteousness, in a manifestation of saving grace, and it had a specific reference to individuals as the “largeness and grandeur of the sacrifice, as offered for all, cannot destroy its individual reference, but only makes its application plain, easy and direct to each individual conscience”. Hence the elements of vicarious substitution in Christ’s sacrifice was not in the nature of a legal transaction, but one that was brought about by individuals “believing in a work already done for them before they believe, and by their depending on Him, and Him alone, who atoned for them by His death.” [...] He insisted that the atonement was not made for persons irrespective of character, but was confined exclusively to penitents [...] maintaining that the atonement was redemptively applied to those made regenerate through gracious sovereign election by the Spirit’ (Brown 2007: 696-697).

they thought arose whenever the source of authority was located within humanity’ (Harris 2008: 133). In this task, they drew significantly upon a branch of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Scottish philosophy known as ‘Common Sense Realism’ (Harris 2008: 131-33; Olson 2005: 92). One of the notable exponents of Common Sense Realism was Thomas Reid (1710-96).<sup>94</sup> Common Sense philosophy was developed in response to rival contemporary philosophical tendencies, exemplified by the work of David Hume (1711-76), which were sceptical about the knowledge of reality and objective truth. Hume drew upon John Locke’s doctrine of ideas which maintained that ‘the direct objects of our perceptions are not external realities but ideas in the mind which represent these realities in some way’ (Harris 2008: 97). In response, Scottish Common Sense philosophers such as Reid asserted a direct realism: ‘we perceive objects rather than the ideas of objects, and hence we perceive the outside world directly’ (98).<sup>95</sup> Reid therefore sought to challenge scepticism by advocating

the existence and reliability of principles of common sense which are inherent in our constitution and which act as the first principles of knowledge. [...] Reid claimed that the principles of common sense are self-evident, their contraries absurd, and their denial impossible in practice. In attempting to reject such foundational principles, he argued, one implicitly presupposes them. He held that there are certain truths evident to all human beings except those who are of unsound mind, or affected by unsound philosophy.’ (99-100)

The Princeton theologians’ struggle against subjectivism can be seen to have extended into the atonement theology which they promoted. Charles Hodge (1797-

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<sup>94</sup> Other exponents included James Beattie (1735-1802) and Dugald Stewart (1753-1828) (Yaffe and Nichols 2009: 1; Harris 2008: 96).

<sup>95</sup> Thus in one of Reid’s seminal works entitled *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* ([1764] 1769), he asserted the faculty of perception: ‘The sceptic asks me, Why do you believe the existence of the external object which you perceive? This belief, sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of Nature; it bears her [sic] image and superscription; and, if it is not right, the fault is not mine: I even took it upon trust, and without suspicion. Reason, says the sceptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. Why, sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception; they came both out of the same shop’ (291).



1878) has been described by Mark Noll (2001c) as the ‘most influential American Presbyterian theologian of the nineteenth century’ (561). Hodge taught at Princeton Seminary for over 50 years and his best-known work is his magisterial, three volume, two thousand page *Systematic Theology* ([1872-3] 1883). In Chapter 7 of Volume 2, Hodge discussed what he termed the ‘satisfaction of Christ’ which would though clearly be classified as being an objective penal substitutionary atonement theology in the terms which this concept has been defined in this thesis. Hodge expressly affirmed the substitutionary character of Christ’s death: ‘He did not, therefore, come in to the world for Himself [...] He came to take their [Christ’s people’s] place; to be their substitute, to do for them, and in their name, what they could not do for themselves’ (521). Hodge also expressly locates his understanding of the significance of the death of Jesus within a juridical anchor

Christ’s work was of the nature of a satisfaction, because it met and answered all the demands of God’s law and justice against the sinner. The law no longer condemns the sinner who believes in Christ. [...] It had an inherent worth which rendered it a perfect satisfaction, so that justice has no further demands. It is here as in the case of state criminals. If such an offender suffers the penalty which the law prescribes as the punishment of his [sic] offence he is no longer liable to condemnation. No further punishment can justly be demanded for that offence. That is what is called the perfection of Christ’s satisfaction. (482)

Hodge also discusses some of the other atonement images which can be located in scripture and Church tradition including: mercantile notions; sacrifice; triumph over evil; and ransom. What is of particular note however is the way in which Hodge continually relates all other non-juridical understandings to an underlying juridical framework which he seems to maintain as foundational and controlling.<sup>96</sup> Thus,

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<sup>96</sup> For example, when discussing mercantile images Hodge ([1872-3] 1883) asserted that Jesus’ death: ‘perfectly, from its own intrinsic worth, satisfies the demands of justice. This is what is meant to be illustrated when the work of Christ is compared in Scripture and in the writings of theologians to the

concerning the primacy of a juridical understanding over the other models and its ultimate universal orthodoxy, Hodge concluded that:

The common Church doctrine of the satisfaction of Christ, therefore, is not an isolated doctrine. It is assumed in all that the Scriptures teach of the relation between Christ and his people; of the condition on which our interest his redemption is suspended; and of the nature of the benefits of that redemption. (520)

This issue is also significant because as will be discussed, Hodge's approach to the doctrine of the atonement foreshadows two of the main points of dispute in the most recent controversy concerning penal substitution among British evangelicals during the mid-2000s. Firstly, the assertion that penal substitution is *the* orthodox atonement model for British evangelicals, and for some advocates even the universal Christian orthodox model of the doctrine of the atonement (the 'orthodoxy assertion'). Secondly, the related assertion, that penal substitution has some form of overriding and controlling status over the other atonement models. Notwithstanding the variety of atonement images which can be located in the New Testament and subsequently in Christian theology, penal substitution has a primary superior status to all other images (which effectively embodies the orthodoxy assertion) and indeed without penal

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payment of a debt. The creditor has no further claims when the debt due is fully paid' (482-3). When discussing notions of sacrifice in the Old Testament and how this can be applied to the significance of the death of Jesus, Hodge observed: 'The Old Testament sacrifices were expiatory and reformatory, and so was the sacrifice of Christ. The certain results and ultimate design in both cases was reconciliation to the favour and fellowship of God; but the necessary preliminary condition of such reconciliation was the expiation of guilt [...]. He was then burdened with our sins in the sense in which the ancient sacrifices bore the sins of the people. He bore their guilt; that is, he assumed the responsibility of making satisfaction for them to the justice of God' (510-1). Finally, with respect to images of triumph over evil and ransom, Hodge again linked these back to juridical notions of law, justice and penalty: 'His death, by satisfying the justice of God, frees them from the penalty of the law; and freedom from the curses of the law involves freedom from the power of Satan to inflict its penalty [...]. What satisfies the law deprives sin of the power to subject us to the wrath of God [...]. Christ is our Redeemer from the power of Satan, as well as from the curse of the law, and dominion of sin. And if a Redeemer, the deliverance which he effected was by means of a ransom' (519).

substitution, the other approaches and atonement models are deficient (the ‘primary controlling status assertion’).

In his discussion, significantly, Hodge also expressly criticises the more subjective atonement models which focus upon the change brought about in people by Christ’s teaching, example or moral influence:

It is therefore the plain doctrine of Scripture that, as before said, Christ saves us neither by the mere exercise of power, nor by his doctrine, nor by his example, nor by his moral influence which He excepted, nor by any subjective influence on his people, whether natural or mystical, but as a satisfaction to divine justice, as an expiation for sin and as a ransom from the curse and authority of the law’ (520).

This type of approach was continued by Hodge’s later successor to the Chair at Princeton Seminary, Presbyterian theologian Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921).<sup>97</sup> In his writings, he similarly emphasised the substitutionary character of Jesus’ death within a juridical framework. Firstly, concerning the biblical presentation of the significance of the death of Jesus, while he conceded that, in addition to what he terms the juridical ‘satisfaction’ approach, ‘writers of the New Testament employ many other modes of describing the work of Christ’ (Warfield [1908] 1988: 261), Warfield nonetheless insisted that

it is undeniable that they [the various New Testament metaphors] enshrine at the centre, this work, its efficacy as a piacular [making expiation] sacrifice, securing the forgiveness of sins; that is to say, relieving its beneficiaries of ‘the penal consequences which otherwise the curse of the broken law inevitably entails.’ (261-2)

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<sup>97</sup> Other notable Princeton theologians included: Archibald Alexander, Archibald Alexander Hodge (Charles Hodge’s son who was named after his mentor, Archibald Alexander) and J. Gresham Machen. Dismayed by what he regarded as the modernist influence which had come to gain the ascendancy at Princeton Theological Seminary, Machen left Princeton Seminary in 1929 in order to establish Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia which carried on the (old) Princeton School approach (Harris 2008: 32; Olson 2005: 91-92).

Similarly, concerning the post-New Testament ‘models’ of the atonement which he described as being ‘largely determined by [people’s] fundamental feelings of need – by what men [sic] most long to be saved from’ (Warfield [1902] 1988: 283), Warfield asserted the primacy and orthodoxy of a juridical understanding (with some accompanying sacrificial language and imagery):

The Biblical doctrine of the sacrifice of Christ finds full recognition in no other construction than that of the established church-doctrine of satisfaction. According to it, our Lord’s redeeming work is at its core a true and perfect sacrifice offered to God, of intrinsic value ample for the expiation of our guilt; and at the same time is a true and perfect righteousness offered to God in fulfilment of the demands of His law [...]. (Warfield [1908] 1988: 278)

In the writings of Warfield we can also locate the first examples of the assertion that while non-juridical atonement theologies have drawn the attention of, and have been promoted by, some theological academics, the ‘simple believer’ has more or less always (to Warfield’s mind) embraced a juridical understanding and that juridical understandings have (and should) be taken to be the ‘common sense’ interpretation of the atonement. Warfield observed:

But no one of these theories, however attractively they may be presented, or however wide an acceptance each may from time to time have found in academic circles, has never been able to supplant the doctrine of ‘satisfaction’, either in the formal creeds of the churches, or in the hearts of simple believers. (266)

Warfield had also made a similar observation previously in 1902 when he asserted:

The great evangelical revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, swept away all that [non-juridical understandings]. It is probable that a half-century ago the doctrine of penal substitution had so strong a hold on the churches that not more than an academic interest was attached to rival theories. ([1902] 1988: 286).

There were also British evangelicals who articulated positions very similar to the Princeton theologians. The Church of Scotland minister and sometime Moderator, Thomas J. Crawford (1812-1875), while conceding that while there were a variety of theories of the atonement and that ‘all the theories contain a portion of truth, though by no means the whole truth, as set forth in Holy Scripture’ (1888: 395), he nonetheless insisted that ‘whatever truth there may be in any of the theories to which we have been referring, is incapable of being maintained, either on reasonable or on Scriptural grounds, apart from the Catholic doctrine of the Atonement’ (399). Concerning his understanding of this ‘Catholic doctrine of the Atonement’ Crawford presented an expressly juridical and penal-substitutionary understanding and concluded that:

God has been pleased to appoint and to accept the sufferings of Christ as a propitiation for the sins of all who trust in Him. [...] He has deemed these sufferings a sufficient ground for exempting all such from the penalties they have justly incurred – is the very truth to be conveyed when we speak of our Lord’s death as a ‘satisfaction to divine justice.’ (Crawford 1888: 187)

Crawford emphatically asserted that ‘the sufferings of Christ were *penal* in their character [...] they were *judicially inflicted* in the execution of a law which denounced punishment on the sins of men [sic]’ (Crawford 1888: 190). Fellow Scotsman George Smeaton (1814-1889) similarly asserted the primacy and orthodoxy of the penal substitution:

The oldest doctrine accepted by the Church, in a more or less developed form, was, that Christ was the substitute for sinners, who would have been subjected to merited punishment, if a satisfaction had not been offered in their stead. [...] His death was a satisfaction to divine justice, and the endurance of the punishment of sin in their stead. [...] His person, won forgiveness for the guilty [...]. That is the grand truth which has always been held in all the great sections of the Christian Church, both in the east and west: and to this Protestantism also unequivocally confesses. (Smeaton [1870] 1991: 474-475)

Similar to Charles Hodge, both Smeaton ([1870] 1991:472-3) and Crawford (1888: 291-2) were also highly dismissive of a subjective and moral-influence model of the atonement. Smeaton termed this model ‘the theory of Abelard, whose theology was as faulty as his character’ (Smeaton [1870] 1991: 472). While both acknowledged that the death of Christ could have exemplary influences upon believers, they denied that these were primarily connected with the operation and saving effects of the atonement.<sup>98</sup>

The evangelical theologians who have been considered as representative of this period reveal three broad approaches to the question of the atonement. Firstly, in the 1846 EA *Basis of Faith* and the stance of Charles Spurgeon, there is a continuation of the general approach exhibited during of the first period of British evangelicalism (1730-1800). This emphasised the broad substitutionary character of Christ’s atoning work while anchoring this in a variety of atonement images without insisting upon the primacy of any one such image (Holmes 2008: 274-275). Secondly, in the approaches advocated by evangelicals such as Robert Dale, James Denny, P.T. Forsyth and T.R. Birks, we can find a more overt if general acknowledgment of the variety of atonement images. Such recognition is though accompanied by varying degrees of unease with overtly juridical approaches and penal substitution in particular. This was for some during this period, such as J.G. Greenhough, a result of the influence of Romanticism. This latter discomfort echoing the type of criticism which first emerged in the second period of British evangelicalism (1800-1845) considered earlier. Thirdly, in the approaches of the Princeton theologians, Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield, and Scottish evangelicals, such as Thomas Crawford and George Smeaton, there emerged

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<sup>98</sup>Crawford (1888) maintained that references to Christ’s death in the Bible, ‘whensoever they are set forth as exemplary, there is no indication given that this is the chief aspect, far less the sole aspect, in which they are to be regarded – but clear evidence on the contrary, that it is only in a secondary sense in an incidental manner [...]. [It] is necessary to keep in view the vicarious and expiatory nature of the Lord’s sufferings, in order to vindicate their perfection as an example’ (291-2).

strident advocates of a juridical atonement theology and emphasis upon penal substitution in particular (Holmes 2008: 276). This advocacy was primarily conducted by making two assertions concerning penal substitutionary atonement.

The first of these has been termed the ‘orthodoxy assertion’ which holds that penal substitution is *the* orthodox atonement model for British evangelicals and for some it is the universal Christian orthodox model of the doctrine of the atonement. As shall be shown later in this thesis with respect to the recent controversies concerning penal substitution, this assertion of orthodoxy assists advocates of penal substitution in rhetorical strategies of labelling the positions of their opponents as being ‘novel’ or ‘revisionist’ and thus ‘non-orthodox evangelicalism’. Secondly, advocates of penal substitution cite the ‘primary controlling status assertion’. This holds that penal substitution has some form of overriding and controlling status over the other atonement models. Pursuant to this assertion, all other atonement models rely upon penal substitution and a juridical paradigm to make sense and to function properly. As will be discussed in the next chapter, both of these assertions are difficult to sustain in light of the evidence presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis which, for example, challenges the assertion that there is anything approaching the status of a defined orthodoxy with respect to the atonement in a manner similar to the doctrines of the Person of Christ and the Trinity.

### 3.4 The Period 1920-1960

The Inter-Varsity Fellowship of Evangelical Unions (hereafter IVF), which is now known as the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (hereafter UCCF), was established in 1928 (Barclay 1997: 13). The IVF was created as a result the separation between its founders and the Student Christian Movement (hereafter SCM). John Stott ([1986] 2006) explained that in 1910, the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (CICCU) resolved to disaffiliate from the SCM. The reason for this was the fact that the leadership of CICCU ‘were becoming increasingly disenchanted with the liberal tendencies of the SCM, and specifically with its weak doctrines of the Bible, the Cross and even the deity of Jesus’ (13).

At the end of the First World War an attempted reconciliation between the SCM and the CICCU failed as a result of ongoing disputes about the atonement. Stott quotes the then CICCU Secretary, Norman Grubb, recounting these reconciliation discussions: ‘We [the CICCU] could never join something that did not maintain the atoning blood of Jesus at its centre; and we departed company’ (14). The desire to form an alliance between the CICCU and other likeminded student organisations occasioned the first Inter-Varsity Conference which was held in December 1919 in London, and as mentioned the IVF was eventually formed in 1928 (Barclay 1997: 13). Concerning the theological differences between the SCM and more conservative evangelicals, Stott concluded

the SCM’s 1919 Aim and Basis [...] included the following statement about the Cross: ‘it is only as we see on Calvary the price of suffering paid day by day by God himself for all human sin, that we can enter into the experience of true penitence and forgiveness, which sets us free to embark upon a wholly



new way of life [...]. This is the meaning of the Atonement.’ But we [Stott and others likeminded] have respectfully to respond that the meaning of the atonement is not to be found in *our* penitence evoked by the sight of Calvary, but rather in what God did when in Christ on the cross he took our place and bore our sin. (Stott [1986] 2006: 14)

Accordingly, the 1928 IVF Doctrinal Basis (reaffirmed expressly in the 1974 UCCF Doctrinal Basis and with only minor inconsequential differences in the 1981 UCCF Doctrinal Basis) contains an expressly penal-substitutionary atonement theology (with a sacrificial reference included). It states belief in:

The universal sinfulness and guilt of human nature since the Fall, rendering man [sic] subject to God’s wrath and condemnation [...]. Redemption from the guilt, penalty and power of sin only through the sacrificial death (as our Representative and Substitute) of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God. (Warner 2006: 310)

Concerning the opposing liberal evangelical position, in his Introduction to a collection of essays entitled *Liberal Evangelicalism: An Interpretation* (1924) the Anglican Vicar Travers Guy Rogers firstly observed that ‘The modern Evangelical [i.e. liberal evangelical] is dissatisfied with some of the older and cruder penal and substitutionary theories of the Atonement’ (vii). Rogers maintained and affirmed a preference for a more subjective moral-influence atonement theology: ‘The modern Evangelical finds salvation for himself [sic] and for society at the Cross of Jesus. [...] It is the impact of the Cross upon personality which he seeks to explore’ (vi-vii). Roger’s colleague, R. T. Howard (1924), was similarly critical of conceptions of sin and salvation which create a ‘deep sense of “guilt” in the sense of deserving a retributive stroke from God’ (126). Howard explained the atonement in terms of ‘Christ’s redeeming work of self-identification’ (137) as involving three stages. Firstly, influenced by Christ’s perfect example of love and obedience through his whole life,

but supremely on the Cross, the ‘first touch of the Redeeming Christ upon the personality of the sinner brings a true and real repentance’ (139). Then secondly:

Blended with repentance there comes the faith which finally links the soul with Christ. [...] It means that man [sic] commits himself entirely to the Living Christ, that through His redeeming influence he may be saved. [...] Through this blended act of repentance and faith the man is brought into that intimate relationship between himself and Christ which is described as being ‘in Christ.’ There ‘in Christ’ he is ‘justified’ and forgiven. [Thirdly,] [j]ustification and forgiveness mean that God, seeing that His child has sincerely repented, and seeing that he is committed by his faith into the personal charge of Jesus Christ, receives him back into fellowship with Himself as though he had never sinned. (139-140)

The third and final liberal evangelical who will be considered here is Charles E. Raven (1925). He talked in subjective and active terms of Christ’s redeeming work on the Cross as having a regenerative power to bring people out of sin through the practice of Jesus’ presence in their actions:

The achievements of Jesus, and above all of Jesus crucified, have been proved through the centuries to contain a unique power of regeneration, of bringing mankind [sic] out of death into life. The multitudes to whom their Master is a living presence, the source of every God-centred motive, the consummation of every God-seeking aspiration, testify to the continuous validity of the characteristic Christian conviction: His ‘Lo, I am with you always’ is as true now as ever; and the recognition of it, the practice of His presence, is our salvation. (76)

Within the Baptist Union, divergence concerning atonement theology during this period can be seen in the controversy of 1931 which resulted from the proposed publication by T.R. Glover (1869-1943) of a booklet entitled ‘Fundamentals’. In this booklet Glover claimed that atonement ‘in the popular sense [...] is hardly to be found in the New Testament’ (Clements 1988: 121). Due to this apparent rejection of the scriptural basis for one of the key evangelical doctrinal markers, calls were apparently

made in some quarters for the booklet to be withdrawn. The council of the Baptist Union however proposed a compromise whereby a second pamphlet was prepared which addressed aspects of atonement theology which Glover's critics believed he neglected. David Bebbington (2010) concluded that the 'publication of parallel books on the same theme was an indication that there were divergent Baptist opinions on the cross' (17). Such divergence on atonement theology was being reflected in the comprehensive definition of the atonement offered by the Baptist Old Testament Scholar Henry Wheeler Robinson (1872-1945) at this time, who asserted:

The Gospel declares that God vindicated His own cause by entering the world through His Son, and through His Cross bears the burden of suffering caused by the sin of man [sic], and by the grace of this sin-bearing, both in Jesus and in all whom the Spirit of God is, makes the world with all its sin a more glorious place than would have been a world of innocence without sin. (Robinson [1938] 1955: 52-3)

The Baptist minister and former principal of Spurgeon's College George Beasley-Murray (1916-2000), writing in 1947 in the course of criticising what he perceived as the serious neglect of the Resurrection in much of contemporary theology and Christian witness, similarly noted the variety of expressions and understandings of the atonement (including: sacrifice, satisfaction of justice, payment of debt, a revelation of God's love) which were held among evangelicals in Britain:

The effect on Christian thought of this neglect of the Resurrection of our Lord can scarcely be exaggerated. It has affected the whole gamut of theology. [...] Even Protestants, in their constructions of the doctrine of the cross, have left Christ on it and presumed that His saving work finishes with His death. The atonement is consequently explained in terms of a sacrifice on our behalf, a satisfaction of God's justice, a payment of our debt, a revelation of God's love, and that is all. (Beasley-Murray 1947: 11-12)

A further example of advocacy of a penal substitutionary atonement theology among British evangelicals and allied organisations during this period can be located in a 1951 article published in *Evangelical Quarterly* by Ernest F. Kevan (1903-65).

Kevan was a Baptist minister and Principal of London Bible College (now known as the London School of Theology) from 1946-65. His article provided a report of a recent Tyndale Fellowship meeting in Cambridge concerning the person and work of Christ at which a set of propositions were discussed. In the article Kevan explained that the section of the relevant atonement proposition which was agreed upon (and which advocates an expressly penal substitutionary understanding) embraced the following understanding:

He [Jesus] bore in His own body, on our behalf and in our stead, right up to the death on the Cross, the penalty due to human sin; and that he did this in obedience to God's will in order to secure man's [sic] salvation. (Kevan 1951: 214)

Commenting upon his reasons for supporting this overtly penal substitutionary understanding (which he terms 'penal satisfaction'), and in discussing the problems he perceived with alternate atonement models, Kevan (1951) observed that:

Many to-day are afraid of what they disparagingly call the 'legal' elements that enter into the doctrine of satisfaction. This is an unnecessary fear however. The legal concept of atonement harmonises with a legal relation in which fallen man [sic] stands [...]. When the ideal ethical relation was lost through the fall, then man came under the relations of legal obligation. It is only by means of the atoning work of Christ that those legal aspects are ended, and in the new sonship of the Gospel the ethical is restored. [...] Mystical theories of atonement by incarnation lack reality. (217)

What is interesting about Kevan's observation is the fact that, although he clearly supports a penal substitutionary position, he nonetheless attests to the fact that 'many

to-day' do not share his position. Thus Kevan deems it necessary to make the comments he does about such an 'unnecessary fear'. In the extract above, Kevan also deemed it necessary to expressly criticise other atonement theologies in seemingly pejorative terms, such as the 'mystical theories' (which is presumably a reference to some *Christus Victor* type atonement theology) in the face of the implied 'reality' of penal substitution. Such express criticism makes it a reasonable inference that there must have been atonement theologies, other than juridical approaches such as penal substitution, that were being actively considered by others, presumably including at least some evangelicals, during this period.

This sample of debate within and between evangelical organisations and individuals during this fourth period of British evangelicalism indicates that the situation found in the previous three periods, where opinion on the atonement was divided, continued. There would appear to be some individuals and organisations (such as the IVF who split from the SCM due to what they regarded as the SCM's liberal position on the doctrine of the atonement) who sought to stress the unique and primary place of penal substitution. Others, particularly those who can be categorised as liberal evangelicals, were highly critical of penal substitution and juridical approaches. They promoted subjective atonement theologies which focused upon the salvific significance attached to the change made by individuals in repentance and in response to Christ's example of obedience on Calvary. But yet other British evangelicals seem to have been content to hold to a substitutionary position, with a variety of atonement-model anchors (Holmes 2008: 280).

### 3.5 The Period 1960-c. 2000

A cultural spirit began during the mid-1960s which encouraged large numbers of Christians of all ages, including some British evangelicals, to explore new approaches to Christianity other than those they had previously embraced (McLeod 2007: 83ff). David Bebbington (1989) is correct in identifying that there were some notable examples of British evangelical resistance to adopting an exploratory and open approach to aspects of the social permissiveness which was typical of this era.<sup>99</sup> Yet, as he also acknowledged, this resistance did not prevent large sections of the growing evangelical constituency at this time from exploring new approaches to Christianity beyond what had been regarded up to that point as traditionally inherited evangelical doctrines (267). In an historical and sociological examination of religion in Western countries between c. 1955 and 1975, Hugh McLeod (2007) concluded that:

Pope John said that the task of the Second Vatican Council would be *aggiornamento* – a bringing up to date, or renewal, of the church. The same spirit was also sweeping through the Protestant churches at this time. Religious reform was important news for the media and for considerable sections of the general public. The middle 1960s were a time of intense, but also critical religious interest – a time when every tradition and convention was open to question, and a reforming consensus seemed to be emerging. (82)

In his interview, Derek Tidball applied his own experience of the cultural change of the 1960s specifically to the issue of approaches to penal substitutionary atonement.

Tidball reflected upon the era of his childhood in the immediate post-WWII period:

Post-war Britain is very structured and institutional. It is rule-bound and there are authority figures that you don't question. So the whole concept of law and

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<sup>99</sup> For example, with respect to issues such as sexual morality and pornography. Bebbington (1989) notes that many British evangelicals supported initiatives such as Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association which was established in 1965 to 'stem the tide of sex and violence that seemed to be overwhelming the media' (264). Whitehouse was also one of the key figures in what became known as the National Festival of Light which culminated in mass rallies in 1971 in Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park, London against perceived trends of increased sexual and violent depictions in the media (265).

guilt and punishment and grace was, until the sort of mid-60s onwards, considered to be the fabric of society. [...] So the sense of the Cross as God's law which we have broken, which we deserve therefore to be punished for; ah, but somebody else is going to take our punishment and therefore we, though guilty, can be pardoned and justified, fits perfectly with this wider social climate.

However Tidball recounted how this situation changed with the cultural revolution of the 1960s:

But then in the '60s you get this tremendous moral and social transformation going on [...]. [Y]ou go to the period where all that is called into question, where authorities begin to be, not only questioned, but lampooned on satellite television programmes, where law, which had been enshrined, begins to be changed and you think it's not so fixed. Where in the '60s under Roy Jenkins as Home Secretary,<sup>100</sup> you begin to abolish capital punishment and hanging and all those things, the sense of punishment begins to go. So actually the world does become very different and still talking about the Cross in those terms seems to relate to a past decade at least, if not a past generation. [...] Theories of justice move very much from retribution to restoration and so on, and so I think it's all part of a much wider sociological change which is reflected very widely in theology in general.

Another highly significant occurrence for British evangelicalism during this period was the advent of charismatic renewal (Tidball 1994; Hilborn 1997). In simple terms, charismatic renewal constituted

a movement bringing a rejuvenating sense of the work of the Holy Spirit, [which] transformed many churches. [...] Renewal represented not so much a theology as a spirituality that was moulded by the temper of the times. Its greatest impact was on worship, where there was typically a downplay of words in favour of gestures, supremely the raising of hands, and symbols, such as banners. The whole movement can be seen as a form of religious Expressionism [...]. (Bebbington 2010: 20)<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Roy Jenkins was a Labour MP who served as Home Secretary from 1965-67. In addition to penal policy reforms he also implemented other social reforms on issues including homosexuality, abortion and divorce which reportedly earned him the title 'the architect of the permissive society' in sections of the media (BBC 2003).

<sup>101</sup> Larry Christenson (2010), an American Lutheran pastor involved in charismatic renewal since 1960, has maintained that this movement 'proclaims the neglected truth that Christian life and ministry depends on believers receiving the third Person of the Holy Trinity. Receiving "the fullness of the Spirit

A popular commencement date for the charismatic revival in the United States is c. 1959 (Christenson 2000; Williams 2001),<sup>102</sup> however, in Britain, a later date of c. 1962-3 has been suggested for the start of the charismatic revival (Harper 1965: 84-85).<sup>103</sup> Initially, charismatic renewal had the potential to have a seismic affect on British evangelical identity with respect to crucicentrism and the doctrine of the atonement by appearing to ‘dislodge the atonement from its central place in Christian experience and replace it with a new centre, that of the baptism of the Spirit. Pentecost was replacing Calvary’ (Tidball 1994: 112).<sup>104</sup> Reflecting upon the challenges ahead for the charismatic movement in light of its initial achievements, the then charismatic Anglican minister Michael Harper observed in 1965 that there was a

danger in thinking of Pentecost and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as the answer to everything. The death of Christ is thus removed from its central position which it should hold in the thought and experience of the believer. Without a clear understanding of this the church which opens its doors to the Holy Spirit in this new way will be in for a hard time. (Harper 1965: 125)

The former evangelical Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey similarly reflected in 1986 that:

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is preparation for living and working as a child of God” (14). He further explained that the Greek word for “spiritual gifts”—*charismata*—gave the name to the charismatic movement. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, particularly those listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11, became a popular hallmark of the renewal. The emphasis on spiritual gifts was prominent to begin with simply because things like spiritual healing, visions, miracles, and speaking in tongues were new for most believers in mainline denominations’ (4). One important distinction between the charismatic renewal movement and what is often termed ‘classical Pentecostalism’, is that the latter comprises distinct denominations whereas the former is a trans-denominational movement *within* traditional denominations including Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches (Williams 2001: 220).

<sup>102</sup> This was the date the Anglican (Episcopalian) minister Dennis Bennett ‘announced to his Episcopalian congregation in Van Nuys, California, that he had been baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues’ (Christenson 2000: 1-2).

<sup>103</sup> Michael Harper (1965) recounts a series of events during these years which ‘were the first fruits of an increasingly extensive harvest in the churches of Britain’ (84).

<sup>104</sup> See a similar assessment made by David Bebbington (2010: 20-21).



In our understanding of the gift of the Spirit these days, it is all too easy to leave Christ behind and to assume that the indwelling of the Spirit is, somehow, independent of Jesus. From this we advance to the conclusion that Pentecost means the coming of the Spirit of power upon the Church and that the cross, as far as we are concerned, belongs to Jesus' past and not ours. (189)

There was some evidence for this shift of theological emphasis in a survey of the content of a sample of British and Australian charismatic and non-charismatic evangelical hymn and song books during the period 1970-1980 (Hopkinson 1981). This survey found that, in contrast with non-charismatic evangelical resources, those influenced by the charismatic renewal contained 'a reduced emphasis, particularly on themes regarded as hallmarks of evangelicalism – such as sin, the Bible, heaven, grace and salvation' (134). The survey also found that, compared to pre-1970 evangelical hymn books, '[in] the charismatic-renewal books, 'salvation' and 'sin' occur only about as half as much as the older evangelical books' (130). Tom Smail (1993), an Anglican theologian and minister who has been a significant figure in the British charismatic movement, recounted how the charismatic movement has been shaped by Pentecostal theology which he believed

like all other Christian traditions, has its own inadequacies and limitations. Chief among these, in my view, is the fact that the basic structures of Pentecostal theology make it difficult to recognize the close and intimate relationship between the renewing and empowering work of the Spirit and the centre of the gospel in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such a failure involves not just a theological imbalance between different aspects of the gospel, but it is the root of many practical exaggerations and aberrations with which, it seems to me, some sections of the renewal are currently threatened. We are indeed rejuvenated and empowered at Pentecost, but we are judged, corrected and matured at the cross, and for these two processes to be brought into right relationship with each other, we must, I believe, understand the relationship between cross and spirit in a way quite

different from the way it is understood in Pentecostal theology that has shaped the [charismatic] renewal [...]. (54)<sup>105</sup>

In response to what they perceived as this initial trend of charismatic renewal potentially neglecting or even abandoning what had previously been assumed to be core British evangelical identity markers of crucicentrism and the atonement, some other evangelicals appropriated Martin Luther's distinction between the '*theologia gloriae*' (theology of glory) and the '*theologia crucis*' (theology of the Cross) (Harm 2001: 1188; Carey 1986: 244). The former emphasises God's revelation in God's works and vivid interventions such as healings, miracles and visions which attest to God's active and ongoing glory. By contrast, the theology of the Cross, emphasises the primacy of God's revelation at Calvary with Jesus' crucifixion as the ultimate basis of Christian theology and understandings of salvation (Harm 2001: 1188). George Carey (1986), for example, defined the theology of the cross as meaning 'that the cross should determine the whole of Christian life and thought'. By contrast, the theology of glory 'bypasses suffering and death – attempting to live on the resurrection side of Christian faith.' (244) In terms of the impact that an emphasis upon a theology of glory in favour of a theology of the Cross, Tom Smail (1993) also cautioned that

we need to be on constant guard in case, without any conscious intention, we should begin to evade the cross by devising and promoting a charismatic theology of glory. A spirit who diverts us from the cross into a triumphant world in which the cross does not hold sway may turn out to be a very unholy spirit. (58)

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<sup>105</sup> Larry Christenson (2010) has reflected that while he believes that over the past thirty years or so, American Lutheran charismatics have, for the most part, firmly embraced Lutheran theological priorities, including the sufficiency of Christ's atonement: 'Nevertheless, Lutheran charismatics must humbly own up to the fact that beneath a formal acceptance of Lutheran doctrine there has often bristled a practical downplay of Lutheran heritage [...]. In a charismatic conference, a speaker takes a cheap shot at "theology" as a deadening alternative to "walking in the Spirit" or being "Spirit-filled." A worship leader ploughs through a raft of contemporary songs, seemingly unconcerned that a visitor would be hard put to recognize any part of the service as distinctively Lutheran. The new or spontaneous or popular pushes aside the familiar and traditional, rather than working toward a sensitive blending of the old and the new' (11).

In Britain, it seems that the potentially seismic change was avoided and most evangelicals associated with charismatic renewal heeded the types of cautions set out above and operated again firmly within a crucicentric framework which acknowledged the key place of the doctrine of the atonement conceived in broadly substitutionary terms (Tidball 1994: 112-113). However, with respect to an atonement anchor, many British charismatic evangelicals have tended to favour a ‘view of Christ as victor over the powers [which] has some natural attraction for charismatics, rather than the traditional [conservative] evangelical view of penal substitution’ (113). As to why this has been the case, Derek Tidball (1994) believes that the *Christus Victor* anchor with notions of triumph over Satan and the evil powers

has appeal for those who have made power a central theme of Christian experience, who believe in the present-day activity of demons, who see the drama of salvation as a conflict between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan and who speak much about spiritual warfare. (113)<sup>106</sup>

And in terms of the controversy among British evangelicals during the mid-2000s, this takes on a particular significance due to the fact that it is out of this charismatic evangelical tradition that commentators such as David Bebbington (2010: 21) have located the preference for some of the key protagonists, including Steve Chalke and his

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<sup>106</sup> Writing in 1989, Nigel Wright, for example, reflected that: ‘Because we are in a spiritual battle the language of military conflict is appropriate. The Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil. The Church of God is wrestling with the opposing forces of darkness. We are to put on the armour of God [...]. Battle imagery has been making a comeback in the church’s vocabulary. It is common to sing songs about being the army of the Lord, taking the land, possessing the fruit, wielding the sword. We are ready to bind the enemy, to trample on the devil, to call the powers to bow down. The clenched fist, as well as the open upraised hand, has become a sign of the charismatic church [...]. Once Christians were the “quiet in the land” who kept a low profile, busied themselves with their own affairs [...]. Unfortunately, this attitude also meant that they were inclined to be conformist and to allow evil to triumph while good men [sic] did nothing. The evangelical withdrawal from political and social engagement, which has been more recently seen as a major fault, was a direct outgrowth of the view that the root of all problems was the need for individual transformation. More recently we have been inclined to see that the changing of the individual must be accompanied by the transformation of the social context if we are to do justice to the gospel of the kingdom [...].’ (173-4)

supporters, for their advocacy of *Christus Victor* atonement models, and dissatisfaction with more juridical approaches. As will be revealed in the following chapters, Chalke conceives of the contemporary ‘demons’ and ‘evil forces’ that God, through God’s faithful followers, will triumph over, in terms of modern societal scourges such as financial poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, family breakdown, child prostitution and people trafficking. The *Christus Victor* model can therefore be regarded as according much better with the social justice emphasis of the members of the ‘evangelical left’.

Two seminal Anglican evangelicals of this period however stridently continued the cause of the advocacy of the primary place of penal substitution within British evangelical atonement theology.<sup>107</sup> The first is J.I. Packer (b. 1926)<sup>108</sup> and specifically his famous 1973 Tyndale Biblical Theology Lecture entitled ‘What Did The Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution’.<sup>109</sup> As the title suggests, in this lecture Packer advocated strongly in favour of penal substitution. In a similar manner to the Princeton theologians, Packer makes the orthodoxy assertion on a number of levels. Concerning evangelicals generally, Packer (1974) noted the key identity-marker function of penal substitution describing it as ‘by and large [...] a distinguishing mark of the world-wide evangelical fraternity’ (3). Later he described penal substitution as ‘that which for more than four centuries has been the mainspring of evangelical piety’ (25). Significantly, in a subsequent 2007 article, Packer also reflects upon the increasing ‘intra-evangelical’ identity-marker function of penal substitution for British

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<sup>107</sup> As David Bebbington (1989) observed: ‘The radical theology that came into vogue in the 1960s also served, paradoxically, to strengthen the conservative position. Conservative Evangelicals were more prepared than most to denounce what they saw as departures from orthodoxy.’ (255)

<sup>108</sup> J.I. (Jim) Packer served in a variety of posts from the mid-1950s. These included positions at Tyndale Hall, Oxford and Trinity College, Bristol before moving to Regent College in Vancouver, Canada in 1979. Although now retired from full time teaching, ‘he continues to have worldwide impact as one of the foremost evangelical theologians’ (Mitchell 2001a: 881).

<sup>109</sup> This essay has been previously mentioned in Chapter 2.

evangelicals during the twentieth century. In this article he maintained that he still considered adherence to the centrality of penal substitution as part of evangelical heritage. In language reminiscent of the pejorative tone adopted by Ernest Kevan in the previous period, Packer maintained with regards to the split between liberal and conservative evangelicals:

Throughout my sixty-three years as an evangelical believer, the penal substitutionary understanding of the cross of Christ has been a flashpoint of controversy and division amongst Protestants. It was so before my time, in the bitter parting of the ways between conservative and liberal evangelicals in the Church of England, and between the Inter-Varsity Fellowship (now UCCF) and the Student Christian Movement (SCM) in the student world. It remains so, as liberalism keeps reinventing itself and luring evangelicals away from their heritage. (Packer 2007: 21).

Packer has also maintained that penal substitution was the atonement theology embraced by the Reformers and, in a rebuttal of Gustaf Aulén's position discussed in the previous chapter, he asserted that 'Luther, [was] the pioneer in stating it' (Packer 1974: 31). Packer located the origins of penal substitution in the Reformation debates concerning justification by faith, as opposed to works. In so doing he holds to the conviction that

penal substitution [...] is the sole meritorious ground on which our relationship with God is restored, and in this sense decisive for our salvation, [it] is a Reformation point against Rome to which all conservative Protestants hold. (36)<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> In his discussion of this issue, Packer specifically makes references to Article XI of the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles entitled 'Of the Justification of Man' [sic] which states in part, 'We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine' (Church of England: c. 1961).

In his 1973 lecture, Packer also appeared to make a universal orthodoxy assertion in claiming that penal substitution is the ‘notion [which] takes us to the very heart of the gospel’ (3) and that penal substitution properly reflects

the insight of believers who, as they look at Calvary in the light of the New Testament, are constrained to say, ‘Jesus was bearing the judgement I deserved (and deserve), the penalty for my sins, the punishment due to me’ – ‘he loved me, and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:29). (31)

Given the discussion of Packer’s advocacy of penal substitution presented above, it would appear reasonable to conclude that in the following extract he is also forwarding something akin to a primary controlling status assertion concerning penal substitution by suggesting that:

The use made of categories of ransom, redemption, reconciliation, sacrifice and victory; the many declarations of God’s purpose that Christ through the cross should save those given him [...] the many statements viewing Christ’s heavenly intercession and work in men as the outflow of what he did for them by his death; and the uniform view of faith as a means, not meriting, but of receiving – all these features point unambiguously in one direction. (Packer 1974: 38)

The second seminal Anglican evangelical theologian of this period to be considered here is John Stott (b. 1921).<sup>111</sup> In his famous book *The Cross of Christ*

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<sup>111</sup> John Stott has authored numerous theological works and served as curate and then rector of All Soul’s, Langham Place, London from 1945-75. He was a ‘principal framer of the Lausanne Covenant (from the 1974 International Conference on World Evangelism in Lausanne, Switzerland), which emphasised the responsibility of evangelical witness to the whole human person (social as well as spiritual)’ (Callahan 2001: 1151). One of the other events which are often referred to with respect to Stott concerns his interaction with (David) Martyn Lloyd-Jones who ministered in Westminster Chapel, London from 1939-68 and was involved in the establishment of student evangelistic ministries such as the InterVarsity Fellowship (Steer 1998: 286; Mitchell 2001b: 695). At a meeting of the Westminster Fellowship in June 1965, Lloyd-Jones ‘argued that theologically orthodox Anglicans and others should consider leaving their denominations. Instead of trying to “infiltrate” the various other bodies to which they belonged, Evangelicals should stand together’ (Steer 1998: 286). The following year, at the National Assembly of Evangelicals [in 1966], Lloyd-Jones delivered the opening address in which he ‘called on Evangelicals to leave their denominations and form a national Evangelical church’ (Steer 1998: 287). At the conclusion of his opening address, it is reported that John Stott, who was chairing the

([1986] 2006), Stott affirmed the importance of acknowledging the substitutionary character of the significance of Jesus' death

the truth that God in Christ has borne our sin and dies our death to set us free from sin and death [...]. [Therefore] 'substitution' is not a further 'theory' or 'image' to be set along side others, but rather the foundation of them all [...]. (196)

In a manner not dissimilar to that of Joel Green and Mark Baker (2000), which was discussed in Chapter 2, Stott also examined what he defined as the four New Testament images of salvation which are taken from different worlds: 'propitiation' taken from the temple court; 'redemption' taken from the marketplace; 'justification' taken from the law court; and 'reconciliation' taken from personal relationships of the home (Stott [1986] 2006: 235). He concedes that, 'Their pictorial nature makes it impossible to integrate them neatly with one another. Temple sacrifices and legal verdicts, the slave in the market and the child in the home all clearly belong to different worlds' (235). Yet despite this concession appearing to lay the groundwork for an embracing of the variety of atonement-model anchors of the first period of British evangelicalism, in contrast to the position subsequently forwarded by Green and Baker, Stott, like Packer, comes down firmly in favour of a juridical and penal anchor.

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meeting, stated: 'I hope that no one will make a precipitate decision after this moving address [...]. We are here to debate this subject and I believe history is against Dr Jones in that others have tried to do this very thing. I believe that Scripture is against him in that the remnant was within the Church and not outside it' (Steer 1998: 287). Concerning the fallout from the National Assembly in 1966, Jonathan Fletcher explained in his interview that he and other evangelical leaders at this time questioned whether: "Is John Stott mad? Is Lloyd-Jones mad?" But it meant a parting of the ways and Lloyd-Jones was never quite the same after that and began to lose his influence. He took a few people with him. Now that was compounded by NEAC the following year at Keele – where I was present – where John Stott and the others said "Look, we mustn't forsake the denomination. Anglicanism is properly evangelical. We must get stuck in and fight for it." So the Free Churchmen felt that we were forsaking them for this riff-raff in the Church of England.' Stephen Holmes similarly suggested in his interview that 'Stott and Lloyd-Jones is the decisive point. You know, maybe we [British evangelicals] are still fighting that battle? Do we want to be a pure and separate, carefully doctrinally delineated, and as a result, [a] somewhat sectarian [...] movement? Or do we want to be a movement that's out there in the mess with the rest of them and as a result, somewhat fuzzy on certain doctrinal issues?'

Thus in the conclusion to his book, Stott undertakes an exegesis of selected passages of Paul's Letter to the Galatians in which he unambiguously roots Jesus' substitutionary death within a juridical paradigm and thereby affirms penal substitution. He maintained that 'Christ dies for me, and I died with him, meeting the law's demands and paying sin's just penalty' (359). He believes that 'The most important of all questions is how we as lost and guilty sinners may stand before a just and holy God' (404). In a preceding chapter, he is also critical of the earlier position of evangelical critics of penal substitution which has already been discussed,<sup>112</sup> such as John McLeod Campbell (who he charges with advocating an atonement theology of 'vicarious penitence'). He therefore concluded:

The attempt by these theologians to retain the language of sin-bearing, while changing its meaning, must be pronounced a failure [...]. It conceals from the unwary that there is a fundamental difference between 'penitential substitution' (in which the substitute offers what we could not offer) and 'penal substitution' (in which he bears what we could not bear) [...]. It is clear from Old Testament usage that to 'bear sin' means [...] specifically to endure its penal consequences, to undergo its penalty. (168-9)<sup>113</sup>

Concerning the situation at the end of this period, while he was not solely referring to charismatic evangelical critics of penal substitution, the former principal of Oak Hill College, London, David Peterson (2001), for example, observed in 2001, that:

The penal view [of the atonement] has had a succession of formidable critics throughout the centuries, questioning whether it is biblical, moral and appropriate as a way of explaining and proclaiming the saving work of Christ. But what is unusual about the last decade is the fact that several writers from

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<sup>112</sup> Stott noted that 'During the last one hundred years or so a number of ingenious attempts have been made to retain the vocabulary of "substitution" while rejecting "penal substitution"' (166).

<sup>113</sup> Concerning Paul's understanding of the significance of Jesus' death, Stott similarly affirmed a penal substitutionary understanding: 'The sinless one was "made sin for us", which must mean that he bore the penalty of our sin instead of us, and he redeemed us from the law's curse by "becoming a curse for us", which must mean that the curse of the law lying upon us for our disobedience was transferred to him, so that he bore it instead of us' (174).



the evangelical movement stepped forward to join them.’ (xii)

While the analysis which has been conducted in this chapter would reject the notion that such intra-evangelical criticism was anything novel to the latter part of the twentieth century, Peterson is correct in that there were criticisms of this nature being made by some British evangelicals (charismatic and non-charismatic) during the last decades of the twentieth century.

For example, a symposium on the atonement was held at St. John’s College, Nottingham in 1995.<sup>114</sup> In the subsequent collection of writings from the symposium, Stephen Travis (1995), who was Vice Principal of St John’s College, rejected the notion that Paul’s understanding of the significance of the death of Jesus included ‘the idea that he [Jesus] bore the retributive punishment for our sins which otherwise would have been inflicted on us’ (37). Tom Smail (1995), who was a former Vice Principal of St John’s, also maintained that there are ‘real inadequacies and deficiencies in the theory of penal substitution that we have inherited’ (77). Subsequent to this, Nigel Wright (1996), while noting the importance of penal substitution within evangelical identity, argued that its susceptibility to caricature means that what is required is ‘a reconstructed doctrine of atonement which draws upon a wider range of images to expound what has taken place through the cross for our reconciliation’ (59). In response to these types of criticism, Oak Hill College, London, devoted its fourth Annual School of Theology in May 2000 to the subject of the doctrine of the atonement.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> The papers presented at that symposium were reproduced in John Goldingay (1995).

<sup>115</sup> The papers presented at this conference were reproduced in David Peterson (2001).

In this final period of 1960-c. 2000, the sample of evangelical scholarship considered above supports the conclusion that there have been parallel tendencies within British evangelicalism concerning the atonement and penal substitution during this period (Holmes 2008: 280-283). On the one hand, in the form of scholars such as John Stott and J.I. Packer there is evidence of sophisticated and passionate defences of penal substitution. Such advocates stressed the unique and primary place of penal substitution by making the orthodoxy assertion and the primary controlling status assertion. On the other hand some evangelicals, particularly those influenced by the charismatic renewal, while eventually coming to affirm the importance of substitutionary atonement, have tended to be critical of juridical anchors, such as penal substitution. These more charismatic evangelicals have also tended to favour *Christus Victor* anchors, which emphasise the ongoing spiritual drama and activity of God triumphing over the evil powers which are still present in our world.

## Chapter Conclusion

In Chapter 1, it was argued that religious collectives utilise various attributes or aspects of religion to construct and define their corporate identities. These collectives in turn combine, emphasise and give priority to different aspects of religion in order to establish their distinctiveness. The sample of atonement theologies for the five periods considered above supports three broad conclusions concerning the historical narrative as it relates to British evangelical atonement theology. British evangelicals seem to have, with only a few notable exceptions, been prepared to embrace a crucicentric,<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Although the analysis which has been conducted thus far in this thesis refers to the doctrine of the atonement as a doctrinal subset of the broader notion of crucicentrism, the word crucicentric is used here

substitutionary atonement (Holmes 2008: 283). The nineteenth-century Scottish theologians Thomas Erskine and Edward Irving, and potentially some of the liberal evangelicals in the 1920s and the early charismatic evangelicals in the 1960s and 1970s, were the only examples considered in this chapter whose positions made it unclear as to whether they affirmed a crucicentric substitutionary atonement theology.

With respect to within which atonement model or models this substitutionary position is to be anchored, the sample considered in this chapter indicates that most British evangelicals have been willing to subscribe to a multi-model anchoring, utilising a variety of different and complementary atonement model anchors. Some British evangelicals, such as John McLeod Campbell, Thomas Erskine and Edward Irving, and the liberal evangelicals of the 1920s, rejected a juridical and penal anchoring. P.T. Forsyth conceived of the atonement as a confession of God's holiness. James Denny cautioned against overtly juridical anchors. T.R. Birks advocated a juridical understanding in a more penitential and subjective fashion which is not consistent with penal substitution. Others however, such as Thomas Crawford, George Smeaton, J.I. Packer, and John Stott, have asserted the pre-eminence of a penal substitutionary anchoring by maintaining the orthodoxy and primary controlling status assertions. The majority of individuals and organisations have though been content to replicate the approach of the earliest period of British evangelicalism (John Wesley, George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards) by promoting a variety of atonement-model anchors, of which penal substitution is validly one such anchor (Holmes 2008: 283).

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to clarify that the dominant atonement theology of British evangelicals has been, in terms of the distinction made by John Hick (2008: 96) which was discussed in the previous chapter, of the narrower sense and has been focused upon the specific atoning significance of Jesus' crucifixion and death, i.e. it has been crucicentric.

Finally, since the first half of the nineteenth century, as a result of factors including influence of cultural changes in Europe concerning perspectives on state penal policy and the impact of Romanticism, there have been some British evangelicals who have been openly critical of seeing penal substitution as a primary feature of the atonement. This criticism has itself resulted in increasingly more explicit and passionate defences of penal substitution by its advocates. This can be located within and driven by the development and deployment towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century of both the orthodoxy and primary controlling status assertions (Holmes 2008: 284).

These three broad conclusions are supported by Stephen Holmes (2008) in his essay. However, intriguingly, Holmes still resists the conclusion that, even in its broadest doctrinal sense, the doctrine of the atonement, or any particular atonement model, has been extensively used by British evangelicals in the construction of their collective religious identity.<sup>117</sup> This resistance stems from his view, which was considered in Chapter 1, that David Bebbington's quadrilateral of British evangelicalism does not encompass theological doctrines and that there have not been any theological doctrines which function as aspects of a collective British evangelical identity. For Holmes, while there is a distinctive British evangelical culture and practice not completely disconnected from theological themes, this distinctive culture and practice does not imply a distinctive theology. Thus he concludes there have never been theological concepts, such as those surrounding the doctrine of the atonement, which have been used by British evangelicals to construct their collective identity.

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<sup>117</sup> This was raised by Holmes in his interview in response to direct questioning on this point.

This assessment was rejected by Bebbington himself in his interview. He maintained that his quadrilateral is a phenomenological observation of the salient characteristics of British Evangelical identity throughout its history. While this does not mean that the four characteristics are to be conceived universally in terms of ‘theological doctrine’,<sup>118</sup> there are implicit doctrinal aspects which accompany them. Thus, when questioned in his interview about what he means by the term ‘crucicentrism’, Bebbington responded, ‘I mean, lay a particular emphasis on the Doctrine of the Cross.’ When then asked to clarify what he meant by the expression ‘the Doctrine of the Cross’, Bebbington responded: ‘I mean the doctrine of the atonement as historically understood by the Christian church. That is to say, the conviction that Christ died for our sins.’ This clarification by Bebbington therefore results in us reaching the paradoxical position of agreeing with Holmes’ three conclusions regarding the nature of British atonement theology from c. 1730-c. 2000s, yet disagreeing with him regarding their significance and what they have meant for British evangelical identity.

In terms of the discussion of collective religious identity in Chapter 1, the following conclusions can be made in the context of this historical analysis. Crucicentrism and the doctrine of the atonement have been used as important markers in the construction of British evangelical identity since the c. 1730s. One model of the atonement, penal substitution, has, since the middle of the nineteenth century, been significant in further defining the collective identity of one group within British evangelicalism, namely conservative evangelicals. For others however, as the openly critical and multi-model anchoring positions discussed above indicate, penal

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<sup>118</sup> For example, Bebbington suggested in his interview that with respect to crucicentrism, there is a ‘spirituality dimension’ which is relevant alongside doctrinal theological considerations.

substitution has been seen as a less significant facet of these British evangelicals' understanding of the atonement. This has at times led to penal substitution's position being contested within sections of British evangelicalism.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when this contestation initially intensified, penal substitution can be regarded as having had an increasingly 'intra-evangelical' function in that adherence to it contributed to the further delineation of boundaries between different types of British evangelicals. In particular, attitudes towards penal substitution marked an important distinction between conservative and liberal British evangelicals. As the analysis to be conducted in the following chapters concerning the controversy resulting from the publication of *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003) will indicate, penal substitution continues to be a focus for dispute and contestation for twenty-first century British evangelicals.

## **Chapter 4 – The Doctrinal Controversy Among British Evangelicals During the Mid-2000s Part 1: Events and Theological Arguments**

The previous chapter considered how the doctrine of the atonement and various atonement models, including penal substitution, have functioned as key theological identity markers for British evangelicals and specifically for groups within British evangelicalism. This examination covered the period from the first half of the eighteenth century through to the end of the twentieth century. The following chapters will now focus specifically upon the doctrinal controversy which occurred among British evangelicals during the mid-2000s.

The aim in the final section of this thesis is to examine what the content of the theological issues which were being contested, along with the manner in which the contestation took place, can reveal about the ongoing status and function of the doctrine of the atonement and penal substitution in the construction of contemporary British evangelical identity. The data used in these chapters was derived from two main sources. Firstly, an extensive range of documentary sources produced during, and as a result of, the controversy will be considered. These will be supplemented with new and original data obtained from a series of interviews conducted with some of the key individuals who were significant contributors to the controversy. Information relating to the interviewees and the methodology employed to obtain and analyse the interview data is contained in Appendices 1-5.

In this chapter, the first section provides an overview of the controversy which took place during the first decade of the twenty-first century, focusing specifically upon the main events, publications and protagonists involved. The second section will

critically analyse some of the arguments put forward by the main protagonists during the course of the controversy. This analysis will draw upon the examination undertaken in Chapter 2 concerning the Christian doctrine of the atonement and atonement models such as penal substitution. It also utilises the examination presented in Chapter 3 concerning the history of the developing interpretation of the atonement and the various atonement models identified as significant within British evangelicalism since the 1730s. The next chapter (Chapter 5) will continue the analysis of the doctrinal controversy which occurred among British evangelicals during the mid-2000s, focusing in particular upon the motivations and strategies employed by the key individuals involved in the controversy.

## **4.1 An Overview of the Controversy**

The event which ignited the controversy among British evangelicals in the mid-2000s was the publication in December 2003 of a relatively short and accessible book by Steve Chalke and Alan Mann<sup>119</sup> entitled *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003).<sup>120</sup> In his interview conducted for this thesis, Alan Mann explained that the initial idea for the book came from a publisher who had previously attended a talk delivered by Steve

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<sup>119</sup> Short biographies of Steve Chalke and Alan Mann are contained in Appendix 2.

<sup>120</sup> A number of people involved in the controversy in the mid-2000s noted that the debate which ensued from publication of *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003) was not the first instance during the previous decades of intra-British evangelical debate about the atonement and in particular penal substitution. This is consistent with the evidence presented in the final section of previous chapter. A good example of such debate being the atonement symposium held at St. John's College, Nottingham in 1995 (Goldingay 1995). It is the argument forwarded in this thesis however that, notwithstanding these previous instances which can be identified in the 1990s, the controversy ensuing from the publication of the *Lost Message of Jesus* (2003) has been regularly referred to in distinct terms as 'the Chalke debate', 'the Chalke controversy', and 'the *Lost Message* controversy' (Hilborn 2008: 17). Thus, while the controversy in the mid-2000s was certainly part of a wider, and as the previous chapter suggested, 'historical' phenomenon of criticism of penal substitution by sections of British and North American evangelicalism, the criticism and subsequent reaction in this particular instance took on a distinctive intensity which justifies its analysis as a discrete controversy.



Chalke. The publisher was of the view that some of the issues which Chalke had raised in his talk could form the subject matter for a book, and this began the process which resulted in its eventual publication.<sup>121</sup>

The book was never intended to be a considered theological treatise.<sup>122</sup> Rather, it sought in a popularly accessible format, to re-present what the authors believed was at the heart of Jesus' message and Gospel – God's love and concern for the most marginalised in society, who are not forgotten by God. That God calls upon God's followers to demonstrate a similar love and concern, which will result in the realisation of God's kingdom (91-92).

One paragraph in the book became infamous and attracted most attention. In the final chapter, in their discussion of the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, Chalke and Mann maintained that Jesus' death on the Cross constituted a challenge to retributive violence: 'Jesus took on the ideology that violence is the ultimate solution by "turning the other cheek" and refusing to return evil for evil' (179). This action had the effect of dramatically demonstrating that, in contrast to the dominant human perception, God's 'Kingdom does not come and cannot be maintained by military force. God's Kingdom is established by God's means – self-giving love' (179). This interpretation of Jesus' death then lead to Chalke and Mann's subsequent observation made under the heading 'A Cross of Love' that:

John's Gospel famously declares, 'God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son' (John 3:16). How then, have we come to

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<sup>121</sup> A number of people who were subsequently involved in the controversy, including Tom Wright and Jonathan Bartley, indicated that they spoke to Chalke and Mann about aspects of the book's subject matter prior to its publication. Short biographies of Tom Wright and Jonathan Bartley are also contained in Appendix 2.

<sup>122</sup> Alan Mann described the book in his interview as 'a chatty, popular-level book which draws on scholarship.' Steve Chalke similarly observed in his interview that the book 'is not a technical manual for the church. It is written to a different audience.'

believe that at the cross this God of love suddenly decides to vent his anger and wrath on his own Son?

The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse – a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement 'God is love'. If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetuated by God towards humankind but borne by his Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil. The truth is, the cross is a symbol of love. It is a demonstration of just how far God as Father and Jesus as his Son are prepared to go to prove that love. (182-183)

Both Chalke and Mann are adamant that there was never any intention on their part to challenge penal substitutionary atonement in this paragraph or anywhere else in the book. In his interview, Chalke stressed that “penal substitutionary atonement” never appears in the book, nor even “atonement”, or “substitutionary”, or “penal” on their own.<sup>123</sup> In addition, the extract above makes it clear that what Chalke and Mann were arguing is that ‘the cross *isn't* a form of cosmic child abuse’ (emphasis added).<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Alan Mann similarly maintained that during the writing of the book, ‘We never talked about theories of the atonement. We never talked about: Are we writing about penal substitution? Are we writing about *Christus Victor*? Are we writing a kind of moral-influence theory of the Cross? No, we were writing a chapter in continuity with the flow of the book [...]. It was a discussion of how the Cross fits into [...] the narrative of the Gospel.’

<sup>124</sup> The source of Chalke and Mann's reference to the Cross as not being ‘a form of cosmic child abuse’ has been the subject of considerable speculation. A.T.B. McGowan (2006: 194), Daphne Hampson (1996: 151), and David Hilborn (2005: 15) attribute the original application of the term ‘child abuse’, as a criticism of certain interpretations of the significance Jesus' death, to Rita Nakashima Brock in her article entitled ‘And A Little Child Will Lead Us: Christology and Child Abuse’ (1989: 51-52). In an endnote in this article, Nakashima Brock explained that: ‘Alice Miller's work has led me to this conclusion, which I presented in a paper at the 1985 national meeting of the American Academy of Religion. The presence of religious ideas that support child abuse is most clearly articulated by Miller in a section on Job in *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*’ (61, endnote 13). The expression ‘divine child abuse’ was also used in an article entitled ‘For God So Loved the World?’ by Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker (1989: 2) in the same volume which contains Nakashima Brock's (1989) article. This is significant because the allegation was made that Chalke and Mann had borrowed the phrase from these types of feminist theologians, something which David Bebbington explained for more conservative evangelicals ‘was itself a red rag to a bull in certain quarters.’ In his interview, Chalke denied that the work of any of these scholars was the source for the reference in *The Lost Message of Jesus*. Chalke maintained that: ‘Where it actually came from was a pub called The George that I used to sit in and talk with people in central London, just south of the Thames. It was near to the where Oasis' offices were at the time. I used to sit and chat with people about their questions around Christian faith. It was a phrase that came out of a particular conversation [...] and I thought, “Boy, that's an extraordinarily clear

Although to be fair, the question which they pose in the preceding sentence – ‘How then, have we come to believe that [...]?’ – implies that some people *do* in fact believe this very kind of thing. And in his first publication on this issue after the publication of the book, Chalke (2004) appears to have contradicted the view that he (and Alan Mann) expressed in their interviews when he wrote: ‘In *The Lost Message of Jesus* I claim that penal substitution is tantamount to “child abuse – a vengeful Father punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed.”’ (para 17). As it transpired, in the months that followed the publication of *The Lost Message of Jesus*, this phrase, and indeed the whole of the book, was quickly interpreted by some British evangelicals as having constituted an all-out frontal attack upon penal substitutionary atonement and all who advocate it.<sup>125</sup>

What appeared to have made this perceived attack even more serious was that it was being made from within. Steve Chalke was regarded as a very high-profile and successful evangelical leader. He was also considered to be a longstanding and prominent member of the Evangelical Alliance (UK) (hereafter EA) (Hilborn 2008: 18).<sup>126</sup> There is considerable evidence to support the first conclusion regarding the

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metaphor for the ‘gospel’ of wrath, anger and judgement that these people have received.” The guy who used it was Welsh. He’d grown up in the valleys, within a form of evangelicalism that made him feel like a worm. It was his phrase. The thing is that, once the book was published, [...] people said that I’d taken the term from a feminist theologian [...]. But, I’d not read her then and I’ve still not read her now, and I very much doubt that the bloke who sat in the bar had ever heard of her, let alone read her! (Laughter)’ Notwithstanding this, even a number of Chalke’s strongest supporters, including Tom Wright and Stuart Murray Williams, questioned whether the use of such potentially incendiary language advanced Chalke’s cause and in fact it had hardened the resolve of his critics.

<sup>125</sup> There were though a number of advocates of penal substitution, such as Derek Tidball and Stephen Holmes, who did not interpret Chalke and Mann (2003) as in any way constituting an attack on penal substitution.

<sup>126</sup> Concerning the profile of Steve Chalke and why his criticism of penal substitutionary atonement made it a major issue, David Hilborn (2005) noted ‘it can take some time for doctrinal debates to filter through from the academy, and more often than not they will remain relatively obscure until a high-profile preacher, evangelist or church leader popularises them. Well, in Britain few evangelical personalities come as high profile as Steve Chalke MBE. Whether through his many media appearances, his founding of Oasis and Faithworks, or his long-standing involvement in Spring Harvest, it would be no exaggeration to say that Steve’s public recognition is comparable to that of George Carey’s, John Stott’s, and of very few other British evangelicals alive today. Hence, when he decided to question penal

profile and success of Chalke's ministry.<sup>127</sup> The second conclusion is less clear.

Prominent members of the EA leadership, including Derek Tidball and David Hilborn, clearly operated under the impression that Chalke was a personal member of the EA. In his interview however Chalke denied this. He stated that while Oasis and its related entities were 'corporate members' of EA, he was never a personal member. If correct, this point takes on a particular level of irony when there were in fact subsequent calls made during the controversy for his personal expulsion from the EA.<sup>128</sup>

In one of the first reviews of the book, Andrew Sach and Mike Ovey (2004)<sup>129</sup> recounted that at the 2004 Spring Harvest Word Alive Conference<sup>130</sup> 'troubled voices could be heard: "Have you seen it?", "I can't believe he's written that?"' (para 1). Among many advocates of penal substitution it had caused 'genuine alarm,

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substitution in *The Lost Message of Jesus*, an issue which had barely registered in EA's postbags and inboxes for decades swiftly galvanised our constituency.' (3)

<sup>127</sup> The biography of Chalke in Appendix 2 outlines some of his ministry achievements. A discussion of Chalke's media profile will also be presented in Chapter 5.

<sup>128</sup> The issue of Chalke's personal membership (or non-membership) of the EA was raised with Derek Tidball (vice president and board member of the Evangelical Alliance UK – a short biography for whom is contained in Appendix 2) subsequent to the interviews conducted with himself and also Chalke. In an email response, Tidball firstly confirmed that, 'Steve was always spoken of as a personal member in our discussions. It could be that his membership was assumed but since the call from some was to expel him from membership I am sure one of the staff of EA would have pointed out this was not necessary if he had not been.' He then went on to explain the membership implications that can result from the EA offering both individual and corporate membership: 'Even if he wasn't a personal member there is nothing particularly surprising or sinister in that (although it may be disappointing!). Many people whose organisations belong do not take out personal membership and think that because their church or parachurch agency belongs, they are automatically members. We've often had to ask people we want to join the council to take out personal membership. These have been usually people leading Christian organisations who are in membership and they've just never got around to joining themselves.' Tidball explained that while it would technically be possible to have the EA's current membership secretary conduct a search of the relevant membership details at the time of the controversy, due to resource restraints and the demands of existing priorities for EA administrative staff, as an EA board member, he would prefer they be left to focus on current matters at hand. He concluded his email with the suggestion: 'The easiest way would be, of course, to ask Steve himself!' As suggested above, this indeed was done during the course of the interview conducted with Chalke and he confirmed that when calls were made for his expulsion as a personal member of the EA, his wife reviewed their personal bank statements which revealed that he did not pay personal membership fees to the EA at this time, and thus, he is firmly of the view that he was not a personal member of the EA.

<sup>129</sup> Mike Ovey is the Principal of Oak Hill College, London. A short biography of Ovey is contained in Appendix 2. Andrew Sach was a student at Oak Hill College at this time.

<sup>130</sup> The 2004 Spring Harvest Word Alive Conference was held between 29 March and 3 April 2004. The Spring Harvest Word Alive Conferences were regarded as being one of the largest annual evangelical conferences in the UK.

disappointment, grief, even' (para 1). In their review, Sach and Ovey proceeded to strongly condemn *The Lost Message of Jesus*. They maintained that Chalke and Mann presented a wrong view of God by neglecting God's anger and wrath at human sin in favour of solely viewing God as love (para 4). This, they said, leads to a denial of humanity's fallenness, sinfulness and depravity. The combined effect of this denial is to remove the precondition which required 'the pouring out of God's wrath on Jesus' (para 10), who, on the Cross, suffered the penalty due to humanity by his death (para 7-10). Chalke and Mann's assessment, according to Sach and Ovey, therefore constituted an outright rejection of penal substitution. This they maintained justified their appraisal of *The Lost Message of Jesus* as an 'alarming, painful, dangerous book' (para 11). Sach and Ovey were not alone in this assessment. By July 2004 the book had been banned from sale at the bookstore at the annual Keswick convention.<sup>131</sup>

In September 2004 Steve Chalke responded to his critics and the furore which had developed over the preceding months. In an article in *Christianity Magazine*, Chalke (2004) noted that while many people had reacted positively to *The Lost Message of Jesus*, others had been highly critical of it and of Chalke himself:

I have been branded 'a heretic', 'a false teacher', accused of 'abandoning the faith' and of 'peddling a modern and inadequate gospel'. Others have called for my book to be banned and have even withdrawn their support for my work. Why? Well, at the centre of it all, in the words of one of my critics, I have 'the wrong view of the cross.' (Chalke 2004: para 2)

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<sup>131</sup> The first annual Keswick Convention was held in Keswick, Cumbria in 1875. Keswick Ministries is the trading and ministry operational name of the Keswick Convention Trust (Keswick 2011). Keswick spirituality can be regarded as having emphasised 'a fivefold message that focuses on an experience of "higher life": (1) the problem of indwelling sin within the Christian, (2) cleansing as a prerequisite to being filled with the Holy Spirit, (3) absolute surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ, (4) the Spirit-filled life, and (5) Christian service and ministry' (Olson 2005: 83).

While Mann claimed that he and Chalke had never set out to write about atonement and doctrine, Chalke used this article prompted by criticism of the views expressed in *The Lost Message of Jesus* specifically to address the issue of penal substitutionary atonement and the objections he has to it. He also explained why he affirms substitutionary atonement, but prefers to anchor this within a *Christus Victor* model. The content of his arguments will be discussed in the next section. Chalke's article (2004) remains important for two other reasons. First, this is the publication identified by both Chalke and Mann, as the starting point of Chalke's criticism of penal substitution. This is as opposed to the controversy beginning with the reception of *The Lost Message of Jesus* which they assert does not address penal substitution. This has the effect of Chalke and Mann arguing that the initial criticisms of their book with respect to penal substitution were not only erroneous but that the debate which ensued was initiated as part of someone else's agenda, presumably advocates of penal substitution. Secondly, this article (Chalke 2004) was authored by Chalke alone. Alan Mann was not involved in this or any of Chalke's subsequent contributions during the controversy.<sup>132</sup> The significance of this point will become clearer in the next chapter when consideration will be made of how Mann has maintained that he was effectively excluded from making an ongoing contribution to the debate despite him being the work's co-author.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Such as Chalke 2005, which is a later revision of Chalke 2004, or Chalke 2008.

<sup>133</sup> A number of commentators on this controversy (for example, Hilborn 2008: 17; Holmes 2007b: 126) have made the error of concluding that Alan Mann's book *Atonement for a 'Sinless' Society: Engaging with an Emerging Culture* (2005) constituted his ongoing contribution to the debate. This opinion has presumably been made because the publication of *Atonement for a 'Sinless' Society: Engaging with an Emerging Culture* postdates the publication of *The Lost Message of Jesus*. Mann explained in his interview that he had in fact completed *Atonement for a Sinless Society* before he started writing *The Lost Message of Jesus* and that the delay in publication was a decision of the publishers. Thus *Atonement for a Sinless Society* was not Mann's ongoing contribution to the debate from which he maintains he felt he was at the time excluded.

Chalke's initial response in 2004 to criticism of the book had the result of heightening the tensions among British evangelicals which had been foregrounded by the publication of *The Lost Message of Jesus*. In October 2004, Garry Williams (2004)<sup>134</sup> responded to Chalke's article on behalf of advocates of penal substitution, some of whom were now questioning whether Chalke could even be regarded as an evangelical any longer (Ekklesia 2004a: para 3).<sup>135</sup> By mid-2004, and as a result of the controversy which had clearly developed, the EA leadership decided that it was time for them to act. David Hilborn (2008) noted that the EA was by this stage further motivated to step in because earlier in June 2004 the Spring Harvest Leadership Team, which included Chalke, had released a statement that Chalke affirmed the Spring Harvest theological position (20). The Spring Harvest theological position in turn supports the EA Basis of Faith. As was discussed in the previous chapter, David Hilborn believed that the operative version of the EA Basis of Faith implied penal substitution. Thus Chalke's rejection of penal substitution in his subsequent article (Chalke 2004) seemed to be suggesting that he supported two mutually exclusive positions – one which supported penal substitution and one which condemned it. It also potentially meant that by virtue of Chalke's subscription to the EA Basis of Faith, and in light of his criticisms of penal substitution, the EA Basis of Faith could be interpreted as not implying penal substitution.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> At this time Garry Williams was a teacher at Oak Hill College, London. He is currently Director of the John Owen Centre which is part of the London Theological Seminary.

<sup>135</sup> Conservative North American evangelical theologian D.A. Carson (2005) maintained that in light of Chalke's 'form of cosmic child abuse' comment: 'Certainly no thoughtful evangelical could use that expression to refer to what lies at the heart of evangelical confessionalism. No one who has sympathetically worked though what the Bible actually says about the death of Christ could employ such condescension. No one who loves evangelicals will use that language' (185-186).

<sup>136</sup> In Hilborn (2005) he explained that he was of the view that in 'June 2004 the Spring Harvest Leadership Team, of which Steve is a member, issued a statement stressing that he continued to uphold its own theological position. Significantly for our purposes here, that position was and still is defined by the Evangelical Alliance Basis of Faith, as well as by the Lausanne Covenant (1974). Indeed, once Spring Harvest had issued this statement, it became impossible for us in EA to stay on the sidelines of

Accordingly, and in light of these circumstances, the EA convened a Public Debate which took place in London on 7 October 2004. David Hilborn explained that the EA had originally booked a venue for the public debate which could accommodate a maximum of 150 people. The level of interest the controversy had provoked was reflected in the number of people who indicated that they wished to attend the debate. This forced the EA to relocate to a larger venue. Reports as to the number of attendees at the public debate range between 700 and 1000 people (Ekklesia 2004b: para 3; Evangelicals Now 2004: para 2).<sup>137</sup> During the debate Chalke essentially rearticulated the position he had forwarded in his article (Chalke 2004) and also called for further study and discussion of the matters at the heart of the dispute. The Anabaptist writer Stuart Murray Williams<sup>138</sup> (2004) spoke in support of Chalke. Anna Robbins and Simon Gathercole spoke in support of penal substitution.<sup>139</sup>

Over a month after the debate, on 15 November 2004, the EA (2004) issued a public statement regarding Chalke's position. Interestingly, David Hilborn has contradicted himself about the processes that resulted in this statement. In Hilborn's (2008) essay, he suggested that the EA acted in an objective, quasi-judicial fashion: 'After hosting the October 2004 meeting and listening carefully to the arguments on both sides [...]' (21). However in his interview, Hilborn made it clear that after the public debate the EA leadership wanted Chalke to publically retract his position and

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the dispute. Both the meaning of our Basis of Faith, and the position of Steve as a prominent EA member, were now under intense scrutiny.' (6)

<sup>137</sup> Concerning the tone which was maintained during the meeting, in his interview David Hilborn recalled: 'I do remember that I have never seen Steve [Chalke] so nervous. He is an extraordinarily confident person. [...] [However] the tone of it was generally quite respectful on both sides.' Derek Tidball, who chaired the debate recalled: 'I wouldn't have put it [the debate] as eight on the Richter scale. [...] There were moments and it was passionate at times but not out of hand [...]. But certainly when the debate got going, one or two from the more conservative spectrum in the audience were quite passionate in their questions. That provoked Steve to respond.'

<sup>138</sup> A short biography of Stuart Murray Williams is also contained in Appendix 2.

<sup>139</sup> Anna Robbins is a lecturer at the London School of Theology. At the time, Simon Gathercole was a lecturer at the University of Aberdeen. He now lectures at Cambridge University.



that by mid-November, with no retraction having been forthcoming, they would wait no longer for Chalke's retraction.

While the statement they issued acknowledged Chalke's longstanding support and (apparently erroneously) his personal membership of the EA, it strongly condemned Chalke's stated position on penal substitution and criticised his 'insufficient appreciation of the extent to which penal substitution has shaped, and continues to inform, Evangelical understanding on the atonement' (para 3). It maintained that the EA Basis of Faith (1970), while not explicitly using the terms 'penal', 'penalty' or 'punishment', nonetheless 'comprises the key elements in the doctrine of penal substitution' (para 4) and thus, by clear implication, Chalke's position was contravening it. The statement called upon Chalke to 'interact more positively both with the theology which underpins it [penal substitution], and the vast majority of Evangelicals across the world who continue to affirm it' (para 5). Finally, in light of the preceding statements, it called upon him 'to reconsider both the substance and style of his recently expressed views on this matter' (para 6).

As strongly worded as this statement appears, the members of the EA leadership who were interviewed revealed that it was not a strong enough response for some of the more strident advocates of penal substitution within the organisation. As will be discussed in the next chapter, in light of his criticism of penal substitution, some advocates wanted Chalke subjected to a form of heresy trial, condemned as a heretic and then expelled from the EA.<sup>140</sup> David Hilborn has observed that even he

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<sup>140</sup> Commenting on previous instances of the EA expelling or 'encouraging' members to leave the EA, David Hilborn (2005) explained that: 'Through its 159 year history, the EA has occasionally urged certain of its members to resign over theological matters: T.R. Birks over hell and restitution in 1870; the Jesus Army over ecclesiology in the 1980s; Maurice Cerullo over prosperity teaching in the mid 1990s; and Courage Trust over their changed stance on homosexuality earlier this decade' (2-3).

believes he has been subsequently excluded from participating in conferences organised by some of the same people who had previously made such calls for Chalke's expulsion (such as the organisers of the New Word Alive conferences). This has been presumably because he and other senior EA leaders did not accede to these more extreme demands.

In December 2004 Joel Edwards (then General Director of the EA) and Steve Chalke (2004) issued a further joint statement which projected a more conciliatory tone. It affirmed their commitment to continue to explore the significance of Jesus' death for evangelicals which is an imperative and 'which goes beyond personalities' (para 5). In his interview, David Hilborn explained that he and some others in the EA leadership who had been involved in the production of the original public statement in November were concerned that the more conciliatory tone of the joint statement would be construed as contradicting the prior condemnation of Chalke's ideas. In the end, Hilborn explained that he hoped that the first statement would be interpreted as having addressed the 'doctrinal' issues raised by Chalke which were of concern and that the subsequent joint statement related to more 'pastoral' concerns for Chalke and his relationship with the EA.

As part of their stated commitment to engage in further debate regarding the issues arising from the publication and response to *The Lost Message of Jesus*, and as a result of the fact that there was a general consensus that the previous 2004 public debate had not provided an opportunity for a sufficiently detailed exploration of aspects of the relevant issues in dispute, the EA together with the London School of Theology (hereafter LST), co-sponsored an atonement symposium which took place in

London from 6-8 July 2005 (Tidball 2008a: 13). Initially Hilborn (2005) noted in his Introductory Address at the symposium that:

I suspect that for most, if not all of us assembled here, the central importance of the cross as such is not in dispute. [...] Indeed, it seems pretty clear that the reasons why this symposium has attracted over 200 people have more specifically to do with how the cross operates at the heart of our faith, rather than whether it does so. [...] In particular, though, our work here will centre on a theory or model of the atonement which has defined evangelical faith more than any other, but which has latterly been subject to mounting critique – not only from liberal theologians, but also from several more radical representatives of the evangelical community. I am referring, of course, to 'penal substitution'. (2)<sup>141</sup>

Papers presented at the symposium, together with some additional essays, were then subsequently published in book form (Tidball 2008a: 14). The contributions covered topics including: the background circumstances which gave rise to the symposium; the biblical foundations of atonement and penal substitution; theological contributions to the atonement and penal substitution debate; historical perspectives on atonement and penal substitution; and some contemporary perspectives on atonement and penal substitution. A number of these papers will be referred to in the next section of this chapter.

In a subsequent joint statement issued after the atonement symposium, the EA and LST (2005) noted that the papers which were to be presented confirmed that there were significant differences among evangelicals regarding the status of penal substitution and atonement theology generally. This situation in part explains why 'No attempt was made to produce an agreed statement at the end of the symposium' (Tidball 2008a: 14). In a poll conducted at the time of symposium, 94% of attendees

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<sup>141</sup> David Hilborn (2005) also asserted that 'the chief purpose of this symposium is not to subject Steve [Chalke], Alan [Mann] and their work to a heresy trial. We have not convened here as a Consistory Court, nor a church discipline panel, nor a Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.' (2)

affirmed penal substitution with 60% of these believing that penal substitution was the ‘dominant or controlling model of atonement’ (para 6). The remaining 34% of advocates of penal substitution ‘regarded it as one model among several, meriting no prior status over the others’ (Evangelical Alliance UK and London School of Theology 2005: para 6).

The atonement symposium however did not bring the controversy to an end. In his interview, Mike Ovey explained that for him and his colleagues who were also advocates of penal substitution, the level of criticism of penal substitution which they believed was raised during the symposium was of such concern that they felt compelled to further action.<sup>142</sup> For Ovey and two of his students at Oak Hill College, London, Steve Jeffery and Andrew Sach<sup>143</sup> (the latter of whom had co-authored with Ovey the initial review of Chalke and Mann’s book) their response took the form of the monograph – *Pierced For Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the glory of penal substitution* (Jeffery *et al.* 2007a). The book is divided into two sections. In the first section Jeffery *et al.* make their case for penal substitution in the light of what they assert are its biblical and historical foundations. In the second section they respond to numerous criticisms (including those raised by Steve Chalke) which have been made of penal substitution.

The next phase of the controversy was sparked by an unlikely source – Jeffrey John, the Anglican Dean of St Albans Cathedral. Unlikely, because John is not an evangelical and is associated with the liberal Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of

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<sup>142</sup> In his interview, Ovey revealed that ‘many of us sort of came away from that conference in my particular network thinking some really major things are at stake here. Unless we actually speak out and contribute fairly strongly to the public debate then what we’re going to be left with is a quiet sidelining of all these [people who by virtue of their criticisms were making a] not so quiet sidelining of penal substitution with knock on effects for our picture of God [...]’

<sup>143</sup> Steve Jeffery is currently the Minister of Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Southgate, London. Andrew Sach currently works as an evangelical Christian speaker and author. He has been a regular speaker at the New Word Alive conferences.

England.<sup>144</sup> During the season of Lent 2007, BBC Radio 4 broadcast a series of six Lent talks. The aim of these talks was for ‘six well-known figures [to] reflect on the story of Jesus’ ministry and Passion from the perspective of their own personal and professional experience’ (BBC Religion and Ethics 2007). The sixth and final Lent talk broadcast on 4 April 2007 (Wednesday in Holy Week) was delivered by Jeffrey John.

John’s Lent talk was not an extensive work. The broadcast of the talk ran for a duration of only thirteen minutes and comprised approximately 2,200 words (John 2007a).<sup>145</sup> John’s basic assertion was that our understanding of the Cross and the significance of Christ’s Passion is significantly influenced by our understanding of the relationship between divine activity and human behaviour and fortune. John maintains that if we hold to the view that divine activity is bound to ensure that there is a necessary nexus between human behaviour and fortune (i.e. good and faithful human behaviour will ensure that God will act so as to provide them with good fortune and *vice versa* – a theology of divine reward and punishment), then this understanding can encourage a view that:

God was very angry with us for our sins, and because he is a just *and punishing* God, our sin had to be punished. But instead of punishing us he sent his Son, Jesus, as a substitute to suffer and die in our place. The blood of Jesus paid the price of our sins, and because of him God stopped being angry with us. In other words, Jesus took the rap, and we got forgiven, provided we said we believed in him. (2)

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<sup>144</sup> Jeffrey John has come to national religious and secular media prominence a number of times since 2003. The events which have occasioned this prominence have generally related to his sexuality and the impact some believe this has had upon his fitness to hold particular positions of leadership and authority within the Church of England. These positions have included: Bishop of Reading in 2003 (Church Times 2003; Morgan 2003; Bates 2003), Bishop of Bangor (Church in Wales) in 2008 (Gledhill 2008; Beckford 2008; Bates 2008) and Bishop of Southwark in 2010 (Wynne-Jones 2010). John is openly homosexual and has been in a long-term relationship with the same male partner for over 30 years although he maintains that he is celibate (Morgan, 2003; Ekklesia 2003; Gledhill 2004). In July 2006 John entered into a civil partnership with his long-time partner (Gledhill 2006; Bates 2006).

<sup>145</sup> An audio broadcast of John’s Lent talk can currently be accessed online at the following BBC website - [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/beliefs/whydidjesusdie\\_3.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/beliefs/whydidjesusdie_3.shtml). A copy of the text/transcript of John’s Lent talk is no longer available on the BBC website however a copy was accessed as part of the research conducted for this thesis prior to its removal.

However John revealed that ever since he heard this type of account as a young child, he has rejected this understanding of divine retribution as playing a role in Jesus' death:

I thought this explanation was pretty repulsive as well as nonsensical. What sort of God was this, getting so angry with the world and the people he created, and then, to calm himself down, demanding the blood of his own Son? And anyway, why should God forgive us through punishing somebody else? It was worse than illogical, it seemed insane. It made God sound like a psychopath. If any human being behaved like this we'd say they were a monster [...]. (2)

John however favoured an alternative view, namely, that divine activity does not ensure or predicate a necessary nexus between human behaviour and fortune and he provided a different perspective on what God is achieving in the death of Jesus. Specifically John argues that it permits an understanding of the Cross and the significance of Jesus' death which exemplifies God's loving nature in choosing to unify Godself with creation, sharing and absorbing the worst of human suffering to the extent of even suffering a horrible death.

As with the publication of the *Lost Message of Jesus* in 2003, Anglican evangelical advocates of penal substitution reacted strongly to John's Lent talk, in particular his references to some beliefs about the Cross as characterising God as being 'like a psychopath' and 'a monster' (Leroux 2007; Petre 2007). Indeed, adverse reaction to John's talk began to be published at least three days before the talk was first broadcast on Wednesday 4 April 2007. An article written by Jonathan Wynne-Jones entitled 'Easter message: Christ did not die for sin' was published in the *Sunday Telegraph* on 1 April 2007 three days before the scheduled broadcast (Wynne-Jones 2007). By evoking the theme of atonement orthodoxy, Wynne-Jones referred to penal

substitution as the traditional explanation of Christ's death and predicts that John's talk 'is set to ignite a row over one of the most fundamental tenets of Christian belief'. Wynne-Jones proceeded to quote a number of evangelical church leaders, including Tom Wright, then Bishop of Durham, who had expressed their dismay at John's position. One of the first formal responses to John's Lent Talk was made by way of a press release by two Church of England Bishops participating in the 2007 Spring Harvest Word Alive conference which was taking place at the same time as the broadcast of John's Lent Talk (Spring Harvest Press Releases 2007).<sup>146</sup> Pete Broadbent, Bishop of Willesden and Leader of the Spring Harvest Leadership Team, responded to John's position by asserting what he believes is the scriptural and creedal orthodoxy of penal substitution:

You cannot read the Old Testament and New Testament [...] and blank out an entirety of language and concept and understanding that means that we are guilty sinners, we need our sins to be paid for and we need Jesus Christ to die for us. That is what the Creeds say, it is what the Bible says and you cannot rewrite them. (para 3)

Wallace Benn, Bishop of Lewes, similarly asserted the apostolic orthodoxy of penal substitution and called for John's repentance

the truth that Jesus died as our sin-bearing substitute carrying the punishment for our sins on the cross is the glorious heart of the Gospel [...]. To deny or vilify that is a tragic denial of the power and heart of the Gospel. I hope Jeffrey John will speedily reconsider and repent of his attack on apostolic Christianity. (para 3)<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> The press release issued by Broadbent and Benn criticising John's position in his talk became the subject of some controversy itself when it was revealed that the two bishops issued it before actually reading or hearing the entirety of John's talk (Ekklesia 2007a; Bates 2007). Broadbent later commented that he and Benn had relied upon reports about the content of John's talk in Jonathan Wynne-Jones' *Sunday Telegraph* article on the issue (Wynne-Jones 2007) and also BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme discussion of John's talk on the morning of its first broadcast (BBC Radio 4 2007).

<sup>147</sup> John responded to these initial criticisms in a letter to the *Church Times* (John 2007b). See also Ekklesia Staff Writers 2007b.

However, the publication which had the effect of drawing the reaction to John's talk into the primary evangelical controversy which had ensued from the publication of *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003) was an essay by Tom Wright during Eastertide 2007 entitled 'The Cross and the Caricatures: A Response to Robert Jenson, Jeffrey John and a New Volume entitled *Pierced for Our Transgressions*' (Wright 2007). In his essay, Wright defended his previous endorsement of *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003), censured subsequent critics of the book (in particular, Jeffery *et al.* 2007a) and strongly criticised John's Lent talk. Wright's atonement theology and understanding of penal substitution will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. The point to be noted here is that Wright's discussion of aspects of the controversy resulting from John's talk and *The Lost Message of Jesus*, specifically with respect to the atonement and penal substitution, established a connection between the two events which might not otherwise have occurred.<sup>148</sup> It also prolonged the debate, particularly within Anglicanism, and by virtue of Wright's international status as a New Testament scholar and senior church leader, gave it a heightened international profile. For example, in Australia, the 2007 Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney passed a resolution which asserted the biblical orthodoxy of penal substitutionary atonement and condemned Jeffrey John's criticisms (Anglican Diocese of Sydney 2007).<sup>149</sup> The resolution also requested that its diocesan Doctrine Commission 'provide a report which explores the importance of penal substitution in understanding the Bible's teaching on the atonement.' This was the report (Thompson 2010) from which one of

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<sup>148</sup> Evidence to support this observation can be located in, for example, the comments made by Derek Tidball in his interview. When commenting upon the effect he believed Jeffrey John's comments on their own would have had on most Free Church evangelicals, Tidball observed: 'Apart from opposing his [John's] elevation to the bishop's bench or feeling very disgruntled that he's even being Dean of St Albans [...] they wouldn't have a clue. [...] It would have been an Anglican issue and therefore it may not be surprising the Bishop of Durham takes the issue up that way. But for most of us, it would be a – "so what?"' Similar comments were also made by Jonathan Bartley, Stuart Murray Williams and David Hilborn in their interviews.

<sup>149</sup> For a discussion of the debate which surrounded this resolution see Halcrow 2007.



the modern evangelical definitions of penal substitution was taken and discussed in Chapter 2.

A number of protagonists then responded to Wright's essay. Jeffery *et al.*, for example, accurately noted at the outset of their response that 'N.T. Wright does not like [their book] *Pierced for our Transgressions*' (Jeffery *et al* 2007b: para 1). Steve Chalke himself subsequently noted Wright's criticism of Jeffery *et al.* and further stated that his only point of departure from Wright concerned the ongoing use of the term 'penal substitution' (Chalke 2008: 35).<sup>150</sup>

The last major events in this controversy occurred in 2007 and 2008. In April 2007 Keswick Ministries and the University and Colleges Christian Fellowship (hereafter UCCF) indicated that they were ending their fourteen-year association with Spring Harvest. The Spring Harvest festival had for some years been one of the UK's largest annual evangelical festivals (Ashworth 2007: 3; Trammel 2007). A press statement released by UCCF (2007) indicated that the key issue motivating the split was disagreement concerning the involvement of Chalke (a member of the Spring Harvest Council of Management trustees) in light of his position on penal substitution. This was a position which the UCCF believed was 'contrary to orthodox biblical teaching' (para 3). Peter Maiden, Chair of the Keswick Convention Council, also confirmed that this issue was Keswick Ministry's reason for ending the partnership with Spring Harvest (Ekklesia 2007c: para 10-11).<sup>151</sup> As a result of the split, the UCCF

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<sup>150</sup> The significance of this point relates to the distinction between Wright's understanding of penal substitution and that articulated by others involved in the controversy. This will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>151</sup> It should be noted that some interviewees, including Stephen Holmes and Steve Chalke, suggested that there were also other reasons for the split including disagreements about which individuals would be engaged as speakers at the conferences (particularly on the issue of gender and women assuming teaching roles in conference events), differences over styles of worship and personality issues between some of the key organisers. Thus, these interviewees, while not discounting the fact that disagreement

and Keswick Ministries set up and hosted a new and parallel conference called ‘New Word Alive’, the first of which was in April 2008. Spring Harvest conferences also continue to be held.

The effective end of specific events during the controversy has however not ended the ongoing criticism of Steve Chalke’s position on penal substitution. For example, Wallace Benn, Bishop of Lewes, was interviewed at the inaugural 2008 New Word Alive conference and in an implied criticism of Steve Chalke and Tom Wright he stated that he has ‘no sympathy whatsoever with people who want to water that [penal substitution] down [...] I think that’s central to a proper understanding of the Gospel’ (cited in Warnock 2008: para 4). Further, in a review of one of Chalke’s subsequent books entitled *Apprentice: Walking the way of Christ* (Chalke and Wyld 2009) published in the June 2009 edition of *Evangelicals Now*, the following observation was made:

Throughout the book, Chalke’s theology is questionable. [...] The book does not refer to a Holy God who is angry with sin and who has determined to punish it. The need for guilty sinners to be reconciled to a just and righteous God is conspicuously absent. [...] Where is Christ set forth as the one who came into this world to save his people? Where is the eternal Son of God who fulfilled every aspect of God’s Law for them? Where is the Lamb of God who bled and died for our sins, bearing upon himself the full weight of God’s wrath in our place? Nowhere! (Ward 2009)<sup>152</sup>

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over penal substitution was one of the reasons for the split, and certainly this was portrayed as the public reason for the split, there were nonetheless other accompanying reasons.

<sup>152</sup> See also Mike Ovey (2010).

## 4.2 A Critical Analysis of the Main Arguments<sup>153</sup>

### 4.2.1 Atonement Orthodoxy

During the controversy a number of advocates of penal substitution asserted that it should be rightfully accorded the status of being considered as *the* orthodox expression of the doctrine of the atonement. This assertion, concerning the atonement orthodoxy of penal substitution, was made on multiple levels including it being biblical orthodoxy, creedal orthodoxy and British evangelical orthodoxy.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, ‘biblicism’ is one of the qualities included in David Bebbington’s quadrilateral of British evangelicalism (Bebbington 1989: 3). The authority of scripture is properly regarded as one of the core facets of British evangelical identity. For this reason, if the proposition is sustained that penal substitution is the orthodox expression of the atonement which can be identified in the

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<sup>153</sup> The arguments considered in this section are not the only ones put forward by advocates and critics of penal substitution during the controversy in the mid-2000s. For example, in the context of refuting the ‘cosmic child abuse’ criticism, advocates raised concerns about the Trinitarian implications, in particular the way in which (they claim) that such a presentation of what penal substitution represents envisages a separation between the intentions and activities of God the Father and God the Son. This is due to the fact that as the supposed ‘victim’ of the abuse, God the Son is presumed not to have willed the punishment he received in the form of his crucifixion. Instead, pursuant to what they believe is a proper understanding of penal substitution and the doctrine of the Trinity, Jesus, as a mature adult, willingly laid down his life in accordance with the unified purpose and intention of all the Persons of the Divine Trinity (see Williams 2004 and 2007; Gathercole in *Evangelicals Now* 2004; Marshall 2008; Jeffery *et al.* 2007). Critics of penal substitution, such as Joel Green (2008), sought to counter this argument by maintaining that the popular representations of penal substitution put forward by the advocates themselves actually do promote the image of there being a severance within the Godhead and presents ‘God as the distant Father who punishes his own son in order to appease his own indignation’ (159). Another argument raised by advocates of penal substitution said that what Chalke and Mann’s approach achieved was to omit or de-emphasise God’s wrath and anger at human sin by characterising such wrath and anger as being distinct or opposed to notions of God’s love. Advocates maintained that this neglects the numerous examples of God’s wrath and anger contained in Scripture and that it also removes the precondition necessary for Jesus’ penal substitutionary death on the Cross (see Sach and Ovey 2004; Witmer 2005; Williams 2004; Tidball 2008b). As will be discussed in Chapter 5, critics of penal substitution rejected the allegation that they have neglected notions of God’s anger. Rather they asserted that such anger is not to be conceived as first and foremost being focused upon individual sins but rather wider societal and structural inequalities (see Chalke 2004; Murray Williams 2004; Green 2008; Mullings 2008).

Bible, this carries significant rhetorical weight in a debate about any theological issue among evangelicals.<sup>154</sup> It also assists advocates of penal substitution in labelling their critics as being ‘novel’, ‘revisionist’ and ‘unorthodox’. As was also discussed in the previous chapter, this approach is not new and can be located in the work of evangelical advocates of penal substitution on both sides of the Atlantic during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. For example, this approach can be located in the work of the Princeton theologians Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield, and in that of a number of British evangelicals including Thomas Crawford, George Smeaton, Jim Packer and John Stott.

During the controversy various advocates of penal substitution asserted its biblical orthodoxy credentials (Sach and Ovey 2004; Jeffery *et al.* 2007a; Thompson 2010; Grogan 2008; Witmer 2005). This assertion of orthodoxy was not limited to the conviction that juridical metaphors for understanding the significance of Jesus’ death can be located in the scriptures. Rather, the assertion was made that penal substitution, in a manner set out in some of the early twenty-first century definitions which were considered in Chapter 2 (Jeffery *et al.* 2007a; Thompson 2010), is the central expression of the atonement which can be located in the scriptures. A useful example of this assertion can be located in Jeffery *et al.* (2007a) when they maintained that

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<sup>154</sup> An example of this conviction can be located in Mark Thompson’s (2010) assertion (made on behalf of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney doctrinal commission) that: ‘As with other doctrines, when it comes to the view that atonement between God and humanity is brought about by Christ’s penal death as a substitution for others, the arguments of both advocates and critics should be informed by the biblical teaching on the atonement and the Bible’s own inner “logic”’ (1).

the doctrine of penal substitution is clearly taught within the pages of Scripture. It is not a tangential inference drawn from a few obscure texts, but a central emphasis of some foundational passages in both the Old and New Testaments. If we accept, as Jesus did, that the words of the biblical authors are at the same time the word of God, then this will be absolutely decisive. If God himself affirms penal substitution, if it is part of the explanation that he himself has given for why he sent his Son into the world, then we dare not maintain otherwise. (33)

Putting aside issues relating to the theology of biblical authority articulated in this quotation, the assertion which is made here concerning penal substitution and its biblical orthodoxy generally, is not supported by the analysis which was conducted in Section 2.2.2 of this thesis. The wide variety of images concerning the atonement and metaphors associated with the significance of Jesus death which can be located in the New Testament writings, militates strongly against the assertion that any of these images can be regarded as obtaining the status of biblical orthodoxy (Dunn 2003: 231). Even New Testament scholars regularly praised and whose work is cited by advocates of penal substitution who seek to make this type of assertion, such as Leon Morris (1988b), have rejected the notion of a biblical atonement orthodoxy. Morris, for example, noted that

no one theory has won universal acceptance and it is probable that none ever will. Christ's atoning work is so complex and our minds are so small. We cannot take it all in. We need the positive contributions of all the theories, for each draws attention to some aspect of what Christ has done for us. And though in the end we cannot understand it all, we can thankfully accept 'so great a salvation'. (56)

Critics of penal substitution during the controversy similarly rejected the assertion of penal substitution's biblical atonement orthodoxy (Chalke 2004; Green 2008; Barrow 2005). Steve Chalke (2004), for example, challenged that while he affirms the substitutionary character of Jesus' death, with respect to the relevant

atonement ‘anchors’, he is ‘convinced that if we are to take the New Testament seriously, a robust theology of the cross is multicoloured rather than monochrome’ (para 10). Chalke also charged that penal substitution and its emphasis upon God’s anger and retributive justice, contradicts Jesus’ own teaching presented in the Gospels:

Then we come to Jesus’ teachings on anger (Matt 5:22) and retaliation (5:38ff). Is it not strange for Jesus (God incarnate) on the one hand to say ‘do not return evil for evil’ while still looking for retribution himself? Similarly, wouldn’t it be inconsistent for God to warn us not to be angry with each other and yet burn with wrath himself, or to tell us to ‘love our enemies’ when he obviously couldn’t quite bring himself to do the same without demanding massive appeasement? (para 21)

This leads Chalke to conclude: ‘the supposed orthodoxy of penal substitution is greatly misleading. In reality, penal substitution (in contrast to other substitutionary theories) doesn’t cohere well with either biblical or Early Church thought’ (para 13). One problem with Chalke’s argument here, which has been accurately noted by advocates of penal substitution (such as Mike Ovey in his interview), is that Chalke’s preferred atonement model – *Christus Victor* – with its origins associated within a military context and the battlefield (Green and Baker 2000: 97), does not itself embrace any greater notion of ‘loving your enemies’ or ‘peaceful non-retribution’, than is alleged with regards to penal substitution.<sup>155</sup> So although Chalke is correct in identifying the non-violent ethic in much of Jesus’ core teaching in the Gospels,<sup>156</sup> proposing the *Christus Victor* model as an alternative to penal substitution, does not stop this position being open to the same criticism.

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<sup>155</sup> See the discussion of violence and the atonement, especially the comments of J. Denny Weaver (2001) and Anthony Bartlett (2001) in Chapter 5.

<sup>156</sup> See for example, Jesus’ teaching on retaliation and loving your enemies in his ‘Sermon on the Mount’ – Matthew 5:38-48.

A further challenge to the biblical orthodoxy assertion was offered by Sue Groom (2008) in her paper presented at the EA-LST atonement symposium in 2005. One of the core biblical texts relied upon by advocates of penal substitution (for example, Garry Williams 2007: 79) concerns the third suffering servant song in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. The initial part of the very title of Jeffery *et al.*'s (2007) book – *Pierced For Our Transgressions* – is a quotation from the *New International Version* translation of Isaiah 53:5a. While advocates of penal substitution have ordinarily embraced a Christological interpretation of this passage (for example, Jeffery *et al.* 2007: 63) which identifies Jesus with the suffering servant,<sup>157</sup> Groom argued that such interpretation is not without its problems, particularly if such an interpretation is used to support a penal substitutionary understanding of the atonement (2008: 103-104). Backing Groom's caution with respect to this issue is the significant Old Testament scholarship which has been addressed to the issue of the identity of the servant in this and the other servant songs. For instance whether there are a number of different 'servants' in the various servant songs? Is the servant an individual or a collective figure, e.g. Israel? (Collins 2004: 385-389). Other New Testament scholars, such as Morna D. Hooker, have had careers distinguished by the conviction that they, 'can find no convincing evidence to suggest that Isaiah 53 played any significant role in Jesus' own understanding of his ministry' (Hooker 2009: 88).<sup>158</sup> The result of this is again to challenge whether anything approaching a biblical-orthodoxy atonement status with respect to penal substitution is possible.

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<sup>157</sup> However such identification is not solely limited to advocates of penal substitution. For example the Old Testament reading in the principal liturgy for Good Friday in the Church of England's *Common Worship Lectionary* (2011) and the Roman Catholic Church's *Missal* (1975) is Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

<sup>158</sup> For an excellent collection of essays which canvass a broad range of scholarly positions concerning the basic question of whether Jesus interpreted God's will for himself in terms of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and the Suffering Servant see Bellinger and Farmer (2009).

The position that penal substitution amounts to creedal atonement orthodoxy, as suggested for example by Pete Broadbent in the Spring Harvest Press Releases 2007 in response to Jeffrey John's 2007 Lent talk, can be regarded as being even less tenable than it holding biblical orthodoxy status. The analysis undertaken in Section 2.2.3 demonstrated how even the broader issue of the doctrine of the atonement (let alone any of the subsequent atonement models) did not receive significant attention in the ecumenical creedal formulae. This is in comparison to other theological points of contention at the time of their formulation, such as those relating to theories about the person of Christ and the nature of the Trinity (Winter 1995: 41; Morris 2001b: 117; McIntyre 1992: 1).

In the Apostles' Creed, reference to Jesus' death in the second article ('I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who [...] was crucified, died, and was buried [...]),<sup>159</sup> is notably separated from the forgiveness-of-sin belief affirmation which is located in the third article concerning the Holy Spirit ('I believe in the Holy Spirit, [...] the forgiveness of sins, [...])' (McIntyre 1992: 2).<sup>160</sup> The situation is altered in the second article of the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) which links salvation specifically to Jesus. However in this instance, salvation is presented more as the objective of the Incarnation as opposed to being a consequence of Jesus' death: 'We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ [...]. For us humans and our salvation, he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit, he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man' (3). The reference in the third article of the Nicaeo-

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<sup>159</sup> The creedal texts quoted in this section are the English translations of the Latin versions contained in Pelikan and Hotchkiss (2003: 669 and 672).

<sup>160</sup> McIntyre (1992) concludes that concerning the Apostles' Creed, 'the reference to the death of Christ is a straightforward historical statement [...] [there is an] absence of any interpretation of the death of Christ along soteriological lines' (2). McIntyre maintains that this position is replicated in other contemporary creeds during this period (c. 200-400 CE) including the creed presented by Marcellus to Julian I (341) and a creedal formula apparently known to Augustine which was used in Hippo (c. 400) (3).



Constantinopolitan Creed to the forgiveness or remission of sins is actually linked to baptism as opposed to Jesus' death: 'We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.' John McIntyre (1992) has therefore concluded that in the creedal statements of the first five centuries of the Christian Church there was a 'sparsity of [...] creedal references to the death of Christ and its relation to the forgiveness of sins' (3-4). This conclusion along with the evidence from the two ecumenical creeds considered above, makes any assertion with respect to creedal atonement orthodoxy extremely difficult to sustain.

Within the context of British evangelical atonement orthodoxy, the analysis of the history of British evangelical atonement theology undertaken in the previous chapter supported the conclusion that affirmations concerning the atonement as being conceived of as crucicentric and substitutionary, could reasonably attain the status as being regarded as orthodox for British evangelicals. With regards to a penal and juridical anchor, such a conclusion is not possible since, throughout evangelical history, a multiplicity of images have been presented and used by British evangelical theologians. It is therefore striking how many advocates and critics of penal substitution alike are nonetheless of the view that penal substitution can be regarded as the traditionally orthodox British evangelical atonement expression. In the interviews conducted as part of the research for this thesis, critics of penal substitution, such as Jonathan Bartley and Stuart Murray Williams, were of one mind with advocates such as Jonathan Fletcher, Mike Ovey and Derek Tidball on this issue.<sup>161</sup> This perception

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<sup>161</sup> This conviction is also reflected for example in the comments of the conservative evangelical Archbishop of Sydney, Peter Jensen (2004), who argued that: 'The doctrine of penal substitution is inherent to evangelical religion; it is part of the logic of it. That is why in days gone by, evangelicals have been at the forefront of the fight to preserve it' (para 19). Confirming the opinion he articulated in his interview, Derek Tidball (1994) has previously observed that: 'This, then, in outline, is the heart of the evangelical view of the atonement. Christ died as the sinner's substitute, bearing the punishment for sin, to satisfy a holy God and appease His wrath. In the same cross we see the love of God made

was also manifested in the EA-LST joint statement on the 2005 atonement symposium when the EA General Director, Joel Edwards, maintained that, ‘Penal substitution is still central for most British evangelicals’ understanding of the cross, and the Alliance’s own ethos reflects that’ (EA-LST 2005: para 9).

When Derek Tidball was confronted in his interview with the discrepancy between the types of conclusions reached in the previous chapter and the popular perception of penal substitution’s British evangelical orthodoxy, he sought to draw a distinction between evangelical academics and evangelicals who operate ‘on the front lines’; evangelical practitioners such as: preachers, evangelists, missionaries and also laypeople. Tidball’s essential argument was that while critical academic analysis will draw precise distinctions between the atonement language and terminology to support certain conclusions about the variety of atonement anchors evangelicals have used throughout history, in reality, beyond the academy, at ‘pew level’, these subtleties would not be recognised nor prioritised. In his interview, Tidball asserted that at the popular level you will find evangelicals

who are not always in touch with what the theologians are writing and saying. [...] So they would not have made the fine distinction between substitution and penal substitution. They’d have heard the word ‘substitution’ and assumed it to be ‘penal substitution’. That goes on all the time and so in contemporary evangelicalism, you can say an evangelical like Joel Green says... Nigel Wright says... Well, yes, but that’s not actually mainstream evangelicalism. [...] So it’s a question of where do you draw your evidence from. What is much more representative is looking at the hymnody and the songs; we haven’t touched on that. They’ve found it time and time again and in modern [evangelical religious music] [...] most of the song writers’ basic default position is a penal substitutionary one.

In this regard, one of the most oft-quoted modern Christian songs which is regarded as promoting a penal substitutionary theology is Keith Getty and Stuart

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available for He provides, out of grace, the atonement we could not make for ourselves. Through that Cross He acquits guilty sinners who believe and restores them to a relationship with himself’ (108).

Townend's (2001) song 'In Christ alone'. Verse two of this song seemingly promotes the essential elements of penal substitution as we have identified them in this thesis:

In Christ alone, Who took on flesh,  
Fullness of God in helpless babe!  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
Scorned by the ones He came to save.  
Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
The wrath of God was satisfied;  
For ev'ry sin on Him was laid –  
Here in the death of Christ I live.

Yet in the very next verse, there is an expressly *Christus Victor* type metaphor presented:<sup>162</sup>

There in the ground His body lay,  
Light of the world by darkness slain;  
Then bursting forth in glorious day,  
Up from the grave He rose again!  
And as He stands in victory,  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me;  
For I am His and He is mine—  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

While it is reasonable to assume that many evangelicals who regularly sing this type of song would not be aware of specific terminology such as *Christus Victor* or indeed for that matter penal substitution (although the level of religious media coverage of the controversy perhaps means that this term is now better known among informed British evangelicals), this is yet another example of the type of popular-level source Tidball maintains is more representative of so-called 'real evangelicalism', which in fact, offers a variety of atonement anchors in a manner discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. Furthermore, when considering John Wesley's atonement theology and why

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<sup>162</sup> For example, this point was made by Stephen Holmes in his interview.

it is reasonable to conclude that he promoted a variety of atonement anchors, evidence was drawn from his popular publications, including his sermons and hymns. Sermon material was also relied upon, in part, to assess the atonement theologies of other eminent figures including George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and Charles H. Spurgeon. Thus while Tidball is correct to draw our attention to popular evangelical sources, the content of these sources with respect to the variety of atonement anchors presented in them may not quite be as clear-cut as he presumes.<sup>163</sup>

If the conclusions reached in the previous chapter are correct, then the widespread perception, by many advocates and some critics alike, that penal substitution is British evangelical atonement orthodoxy needs to be accounted for.<sup>164</sup> The most plausible explanation of this phenomenon would seem to be that this is an example of how susceptible to artificiality the perceived contents of a received identity marker can indeed be. The result in this instance being the creation of an artificial narrative. Enough British evangelicals have, over time, come to honestly believe that the content of their received narrative with respect to atonement orthodoxy is a penal substitutionary expression. And notwithstanding the fact that analysis of the content of the actual historical narrative can show it to have been something different in the past,

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<sup>163</sup> A qualitative study was conducted of the soteriological positions of forty-five Anglican worshipers in rural North Yorkshire (Christie and Astley 2009). All of the respondents who were interviewed were described as having an ‘ordinary theology’ in that they ‘have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind’ (177). Of the six respondents who identified themselves as being evangelicals, all of these affirmed a substitutionary understanding of the significance of Jesus’ death. However, while they often used language which embraced a juridical penal atonement anchor, this was not exclusively the case. For instance, these evangelical respondents also employed mercantile, redemption and *Christus Victor* images (187ff).

<sup>164</sup> During his interview, David Bebbington revealed that at the time of writing *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989), and in the years following, he too had assumed that penal substitution had been the pre-eminent British evangelical atonement theology from the 1730s until the beginning of the twentieth century. However, when he had cause to re-examine the actual evidence of the atonement theologies articulated by some evangelicals for a recent conference paper, namely Bebbington (2010), he was surprised to find that this was in fact not the case. During the nineteenth century Bebbington maintains that the governmental theory of the atonement (an explanation of this was provided previously in Chapter 3) was the predominant atonement model among British nonconformist evangelicals. He further confirmed one of the important conclusions reached in the previous chapter that during the nineteenth century, while some Congregationalists and Baptists were also content to affirm penal substitution, others were less comfortable with this.

the very fact that enough people, over enough time, have presumed something else to be the case, the artificial narrative becomes the presumed narrative. This is then further promulgated in good faith. This is the type of outcome which it would seem reasonable to conclude Stuart Murray Williams was alluding to in his interview when he made the following observation:

I think because it [the understanding that penal substitution is British evangelical orthodoxy] has been so dominant for so long, while there is recognition that there are other [atonement] motifs, they really are secondary and this is the primary one, this is what it really means. The other things may be helpful illustrations of some of the fringe benefits, but actually this is the heart of it. I think people are genuine and serious about that. I don't think it's just a rhetorical device. I do think it's very real.

#### **4.2.2 The Primary Controlling Status of Penal Substitution**

When faced with the kinds of arguments set out above relating to the fact that the New Testament writers and Christian theologians throughout the centuries have promoted a variety of atonement models, some advocates of penal substitution have responded with what was previously termed the 'primary controlling status assertion'. This assertion maintains that while a plurality of New Testament atonement images is acknowledged, it is nonetheless the case that a juridical interpretive framework, and penal substitution in particular, has a primary controlling status. Further, that the other models, on their own, and without an overriding and controlling juridical framework, are inadequate. So for example, Jeffery *et al.* (2007a) maintained that

other aspects of the atonement cease to make sense if penal substitution is denied [...] penal substitution is essential to Christ's victory over evil powers [...], to his restoration of the relationships between sinners and God (reconciliation) and to the liberation he brings from captivity to sin and Satan (redemption or ransom). Far from being viable alternatives to penal substitution, they are outworkings of it. As the hub from which all of these other doctrines fan out, penal substitution is surely central. [...] Of course, none of this implies that the other biblical perspectives on the atonement are either untrue or insignificant. It does establish that penal substitution is absolutely central, and much else would simply fall apart without it. (211)<sup>165</sup>

As with the orthodoxy assertion, the primary controlling assertion is unsustainable in the light of the analysis with respect to the various biblical images and metaphors which was conducted in Section 2.2.2 of this thesis. There is simply not the evidence to sustain the argument that any of these images are primary or controlling or that there would have been any particular motivation for the biblical writers to want to convey this assumption or conclusion. When Tom Wright was questioned about why he has rejected the primary controlling status assertion, he echoed British evangelical scholars considered in the previous chapter, such as Robert Dale, by maintaining that one of the main reasons for this was the incompatibility of the various images. So for

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<sup>165</sup> Mark Thompson (2010) made a similar assertion and further explained how, he maintains, penal substitution's primary controlling status operates with respect to the other atonement models: 'Penal substitution is therefore the nucleus which enables the other images of atonement to become an organic whole. The suffering servant was promised vindication, precisely because he was willing to lay down his life for the justification of many others (Isa. 53:10-12). And in fulfilment of this prophecy, Paul proclaimed that he "was handed over because of our transgressions, and raised because of our justification" (Rom. 4:25). The cross represents a victory over the evil one and all that stands against us because, as Paul insists, the triumph of the cross over the powers and authorities is tied to the forgiveness of sins. The cross cancelled "the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands" (Col. 2: 13-15). Once this "record of debt" is cancelled, Satan has no grounds of accusation to demand the sinner's death, and so he is neutralised (Heb. 2:14-15). Finally, the death of a man on a Roman instrument of torture and execution is a demonstration of love precisely because this insurrectionist's death is what we deserve. [...] The Spirit-wrought awareness of God's love for us in sending his Son to die for us, then becomes the enabling power to transform all of life, and the Christian life takes on a "cruciform" shape (putting off/putting on; dying/rising with Christ). Thus all other images of the atonement (such as sacrifice, moral example, victory over evil powers) derive their true power from having at their core the fact that Christ as our representative, became sin for us and bore the wrath of God when he took the penalty of death, in our place, on our behalf, instead of us, for us' (161-2). This statement also echoes the position of Roger Nicole (2004) who argued that the 'penal substitution of Christ is the vital centre of the atonement, the linchpin without which everything else [other atonement models] loses its foundation and flies off the handle so to speak' (Nicole 2004: 451). See also Packer (2004: 416).

example, Wright correctly observed that with respect to seeing penal substitution and sacrificial images as being connected

the notion of sacrifice actually is a whole other thing. In Isaiah 53 the notion of sacrifice is there alongside the penal substitution language. But I think you cannot coalesce them. And I suspect that the sacrificial imagery is significantly different and equally powerful.

Concerning the Pauline writings, James Dunn (2003), for example, has also concluded that because there is such a variety of metaphors employed to explain the significance of Jesus' death: 'It would be unwise, therefore, to make any one of these images normative and to fit all the rest into it, even the predominant metaphor of [cultic] sacrifice' (Dunn 2003: 231).<sup>166</sup> Stephen Holmes, who is an advocate of penal substitution,<sup>167</sup> similarly observed in his interview concerning the primary controlling status assertion 'if that is the truth, then inspiring the writers of the New Testament, the Holy Spirit did a really good job trying to hide it'. Holmes further argued that his 'problem with making any model of the atonement either a controlling or central one is that you're reducing the atonement to one example of a more general set of human experiences. And I think that's just got to be wrong.'

In his opening address to the 2005 atonement symposium, David Hilborn (2005) seemed to want to temper the primary controlling status assertion by limiting it to being an *evangelical* priority (which as an evangelical, he himself supports), as

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<sup>166</sup> Dunn argues that 'One of the most powerful images used by Paul to explicate the significance of Christ's death is that of the cultic sacrifice, or more precisely the 'sin offering' which could be offered up by individuals or groups in the Jerusalem temple (Leviticus 4) and the annual Day of Atonement sacrifices (Leviticus 16:11-19)' (Dunn 2003: 212). As to why Dunn believes Paul's sacrificial atonement metaphors should be understood as being of a cultic nature and operating within this paradigm as distinct from others, see Dunn (2003: 212ff).

<sup>167</sup> In his interview, Stephen Holmes affirmed that 'what I would say is that penal substitution, as a model [of the atonement], captures certain aspects of what I believe the truth of what happened at the Cross better, more clearly, than any other model I know.' See also Holmes (2007b).

opposed to necessarily being some biblical or systematic theological truth. Hilborn argued:

Historically, this atonement has been explained by various theories drawn from a wide range of biblical imagery, and Evangelicals have characteristically acknowledged that orthodox understanding of it depends on a combination of such theories, rather than on any one in isolation. [...] Yet as I have noted, amidst these and other theories penal substitution has long been regarded as the ‘controlling model’ within mainline evangelicalism – the *sine qua non* of our soteriology. (4)

There was some evidence generated during the controversy to support Hilborn’s assertion, although this was far from being a unanimous position. As was mentioned in the previous section, the poll conducted of attendees at the 2005 atonement symposium co-sponsored by the EA and LST, indicated that while 94% of respondents affirmed penal substitution, 60% believed that penal substitution was the ‘dominant or controlling model of atonement’ while the remaining 34% simply ‘regarded it as one model among several, meriting no prior status over the others’ (Evangelical Alliance UK and London School of Theology 2005: para 6). While this is only a poll taken at one particular conference, it is a poll of evangelicals who, by their attending, are presumably interested and to some degree informed about the relevant issues. That said, the poll does mean that of the total number of respondents, only 60% supported the primary controlling status assertion. This percentage is far from conclusive and does not provide a particularly solid basis to support Hilborn’s conclusion, or a statistic which can be said to be demonstrating his view as normative among British evangelicals.



### 4.2.3 Tom Wright's Contribution and Atonement Theology

As was mentioned in the first section of this chapter, Tom Wright's main foray into the controversy was through the medium of his essay entitled 'The Cross and the Caricatures: A Response to Robert Jenson, Jeffrey John and a New Volume entitled *Pierced for Our Transgressions*' (Wright 2007). The essay can be regarded as having had three main objectives. Firstly, Wright wanted to criticise Jeffrey John's position as articulated in his 2007 lent talk. Secondly, he wanted to support Steve Chalke's position (which Wright maintained relied heavily upon his own work on the subject of atonement theology, for example his book *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996)). Thirdly, he wanted to respond to some of Chalke's critics, in particular, Jeffery *et al.*

Concerning Jeffrey John, Wright essentially maintained that John engaged in a superficial analysis of the relevant biblical texts and themes. This resulted in John rejecting what (Wright maintains) are legitimate and core biblical principles including divine wrath, moral providence and the atonement (3). Concerning the atonement itself, Wright charged that what John engaged with in his Lent talk was a presentation and then rejection of a crude caricature of penal substitution which conceives of 'the angry God upstairs and the suffering Jesus placating him' (5). This resulted in John completely neglecting what Wright maintains are the valid juridical atonement images in the New Testament writings (such as Romans 3:24-26) which emphasise that 'the propitiatory effect of Jesus' death is seen as the result of God's overarching and overwhelming mercy and love' (6).<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Wright (2007) responded to what he conceived as John's approach: 'To throw away the reality because you don't like the caricature is like cutting out the patient's heart to stop a nosebleed. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and all because of the unstoppable love of the one creator God. There is "no condemnation" for those who are in Christ, because on the cross God condemned sin in the flesh of the Son who, as the expression of his own self-giving love, had been sent for that very

However as Joel Green (2008) importantly observed in his presentation at the 2005 EA-LST atonement symposium, one of the first and recurring condemnations made by advocates of penal substitution in the face of criticism is the allegation that such critics are challenging a caricature of penal substitution (Green 2008: 159).<sup>169</sup> The problem that Green has with this condemnation, is that he maintains that it is precisely this type of allegedly caricatured articulation of penal substitution (as distinct from more considered and nuanced versions) which is ‘articulated at the popular level by Sunday school teachers, Christian-camp counsellors, preachers, evangelists, in sermons, in praise songs, around campfires, and in small-group Bible studies’ (159). Thus it is this popular and widely articulated version of penal substitution (caricatured or otherwise) which critics are concerned with.

Concerning Wright’s criticism of Jeffery *et al.* (2007a), his primary concern with their approach is that they remove elements of the scriptural account of the significance of Jesus’ death and then place them within a different (unbiblical) framework. This, he argues, results in a distorted understanding of penal substitution (10).<sup>170</sup> Thus Wright concluded: ‘there are several forms of the doctrine of penal substitution, and some are more biblical than others’ (10). Wright maintained that Jeffery *et al.* mistakenly

ignore the story of Israel. Their grand narrative goes from creation, fall, sin and judgment to the internal relationships within the Trinity and thence to

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purpose. “He did not spare his very own Son, but gave him up for us all.” That’s what Good Friday was, and is, all about’ (8).

<sup>169</sup> This accusation is something which Green indicated has regularly resulted from the criticisms he and Mark Baker made of penal substitution in their book Green and Baker (2000).

<sup>170</sup> To elucidate this criticism, Wright used the illustration of a children’s ‘follow-the-dots puzzle’ where the aim is to make a particular picture by drawing ‘the lines according to the sequence of the numbers that go with each dot. If you ignore the actual order of the numbers, you can still join up all the dots, but you may well end up drawing, shall we say, a donkey instead of an elephant [...]. Even so, it is possible to join up all the dots of biblical doctrines, to go down a list of key dogmas and tick all the boxes, but still to join them up with a narrative which may well overlap with the one the Bible tells in some ways but which emphatically does not in other ways. And that is, visibly and demonstrably, what has happened in *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, at both large and small scale’ (10-11).

penal substitution. But the fully biblical meaning of the cross, as presented by the four evangelists, is that the cross means what it means as the climax of the entire story of Jesus – and that the story of Jesus means what it means as the climax of the entire narrative to which the gospels offer themselves as the climactic and decisive moment, namely, the story of Israel from Abraham to Jesus [...], and thus the story of Israel seen as the divine answer to the problem of Adam. (11)

Wright has maintained that this story of Israel, from Abraham to Jesus, which climaxes upon the Cross to overcome the problem of Adam<sup>171</sup> and which makes possible atonement between God and humanity, is properly to be regarded as *Christus Victor* (13). This notion of *Christus Victor* is to be understood as the overriding theme within which the legitimate biblical references to juridical concepts and penal substitutionary understandings of Jesus' death (as Wright conceives them) have a supporting function (13).<sup>172</sup> When questioned in his interview about why he believes this to be the case, he observed:

I would say that the way that penal substitution is normally expanded is itself deficient, because it fails to pay attention to the primary biblical soteriology, which is that God calls Abraham's family as the means of saving the world. Within that penal substitution nests, centrally, and plays the role it plays. Take it out of that framework and it will expand and do all sorts of things which it wasn't supposed to [i.e. what Wright charges Jeffery *et al.* have done in their book].

Concerning Wright's understanding of the function of penal substitution within this overriding biblical account, in a previous essay entitled 'Redemption from the New Perspective? Towards a Multi-Layered Pauline Theology of the Cross' (Wright

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<sup>171</sup> Which expression Wright (2007) seems to be employing as a shorthand way of referring to 'the multiple strands of idolatry, sin, evil, wickedness, oppression, violence, judgment and all the rest throughout the Old Testament' (13).

<sup>172</sup> In Wright (1997) he similarly maintains: 'For this reason I suggest that we give priority – a priority among equals, perhaps, but still a priority – to those Pauline expressions of the crucifixion of Jesus which describes it as the decisive victory over the "principalities and powers". Nothing in the many other expressions of the meaning of the cross is lost if we put this in the centre' (47). D.A. Carson (2007) has also observed that Wright has effectively elevated the *Christus Victor* model to that of having 'controlling status' (para 13). Alan Spence (2004), for example, examines Wright's argument in particular and rejects the *Christus Victor* model as validly constituting the central soteriological interpretive scheme for Paul's Letter to the Romans (408ff).

2004), he firstly explained that Paul understood Israel as God's chosen people to overcome the problem of sin and alienation from God (brought about by the fall of Adam). God gave Israel the law (the Torah) to assist them in carrying out this sacred task. However, as a result of Israel's unfaithfulness to their task, the law turned against Israel and condemned Israel (manifested in the first destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile). Hence the chosen people themselves became part of the very problem they were expected to overcome. This created a problem: 'What can God do now about those promises? What will happen to the divine plan to bless the whole world through Israel?' (84-85). Wright maintains that because the law had functioned to identify and condemn Israel's unfaithfulness and sin, this process has had the effect of 'draw[ing] sin onto one place, luring it forwards to concentrate all its efforts at one spot' (89). The law has functioned as:

God's agent in the necessarily negative period between Moses and Jesus, [and] was used to draw sin onto one place – Israel, and thence Israel's representative, the Messiah – so that, in his crucifixion, it could be punished at last as it deserved. And in that punishment – here the penal substitutionary theory makes its perfectly valid point – 'there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' ([Romans] 8:1). No condemnation for God's people because God has condemned sin in the flesh of Christ: that is the perfectly Pauline point underneath the substitutionary language. (89)

Wright sought to particularly emphasise what he maintains is the subtle but crucial difference between his understanding of how penal substitution here works for Paul and other erroneous understandings, which would include Jeffery *et al.*'s. Wright stressed that:

Paul does not say either that God punished Jesus or that God punished Jesus for 'my sins' [...]. What Paul says is that God punished *sin* – in the flesh, that is, the flesh of Jesus. [...] God was punishing sin rather than punishing Jesus, since of course the point was that he had come 'in the likeness of sinful flesh'. (89)

Thus by his death on the Cross, Jesus ‘redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us [...] in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith’ (Galatians 3: 13-14). In terms of Wright’s understanding of the overriding biblical account:

Israel has been unfaithful to her commission, but God remains faithful. The answer is that God has dealt with this very specific problem in the Messiah’s becoming a curse, bearing in his own body the curse which hung over Israel, and thus unblocking the road for the promise to flow through to the Gentiles, as always intended. (2007: 12)

Jesus is firstly a penal substitute for Israel and through Israel for the world. As he stated in his interview, ‘Jesus is Israel for Israel and is, capital ‘I’, for the world.’

The outline above is only a brief summary of Wright’s position on this issue. The two essays which have been referred to (Wright 2004 and 2007) are conceptually dense and at times rapidly enter into technical discussions of specific exegetical interpretations with little introduction. If one of the alleged strengths of penal substitution is its clear and simple communicability relative to other atonement models, then Wright’s version of it surrenders this advantage!<sup>173</sup> What is clear though is that Wright’s understanding of what constitutes penal substitution is significantly different from all of the other interpretations which have been discussed in this thesis.<sup>174</sup> Steve Chalke (2008) noted this when he observed

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<sup>173</sup> Although in his interview, Wright did make an attempt at what he regarded as a simple summary of his understanding of the atonement: ‘the promise to Abraham – it’s the road block thing. That God makes promises to Abraham but Israel’s failure means that the promises aren’t getting out to the world. Christ comes to the place of failure, takes it upon himself, now the promises can get out. It’s actually, once you see it, it’s very straightforward. It’s just not what the evangelical tradition has wanted to say about it.’

<sup>174</sup> In his interview Mike Ovey affirmed this interpretation when he observed concerning Wright’s understanding of penal substitution: ‘So it’s completely unhistorical. It’s completely out of line with [...] the development of penal substitution within the evangelical community or, as far as I know, outside it.’

his [Wright's] understanding – with which I feel a deep resonance – is so far removed from what is commonly taught under this label [penal substitution] as he acknowledges, I believe it is better to abandon use of the term altogether and restate the truth in fresh ways. (35)

In his interview, Chalke elaborated on this issue further when he explained that from a pragmatic perspective:

I haven't got the time – or energy - to work through the massive misunderstanding in our culture, both inside and outside the church, around the term [penal substitution]. So, rather than use it and then try to rehabilitate it - after all it's not biblical language of itself is it – I believe it is better to move on. Why bother trying to redeem a term that's just technical jargon anyway? In my view, it's far better to spend our time finding better, clearer, more helpful and true metaphors that shed light on all that Christ has achieved for us through his life, death and resurrection.<sup>175</sup>

It is also unclear from Wright's understanding of penal substitution how individual believers subjectively access the salvific benefits which Jesus' death in 'unblocking' the failure of Israel achieved.<sup>176</sup> Or whether in fact there is actually some completely objective and universalist salvific benefit provided to all people by virtue of Jesus' penal substitutionary death. Although, to be fair, this is a criticism which could be levelled at most of the *Christus Victor* expressions. The closest Wright got to explaining the role of individual people and groups (presumably including the church) was the following observation which he made in his interview:

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<sup>175</sup> In his interview Stuart Murray Williams similarly observed, concerning Wright's attempt at defining penal substitution in a different way to other advocates that might be more palatable to critics: 'I guess I'm not particularly hopeful that it can be reconstituted. I think you have to so emasculate it and reinterpret it that you end up with something really quite different. And I guess I probably think, "Well let's just say so then. Let's just say this isn't appropriate for our culture. I would go a little bit further and say I don't think this was a legitimate way of contextualising even 450 years ago. Let's just move on. Let's work with a range of other models.'

<sup>176</sup> In his interview, David Hilborn observed that: 'the difficulty I think with the classical expression penal substitution [...] [is that it] has been unduly forensic and unduly individualistic in relation to the forensics if you like. And Wright is clearly trying to present a corporate corrective to that and Israel is the obvious model to go through. [...] Some more conservative Evangelicals have kind of given up taking what he [Wright] says too seriously in relation to their own doctrinal affirmations.'

I really do think that the way that the juridical language works is like this. That God is the creator who is going to put the whole world to rights at the last. And that God anticipates that in Jesus Christ. And God further anticipates it in the putting to rights of individuals and so on. But that the putting to rights in Jesus Christ and of individuals is aimed at the eventual putting to rights of all things. And that the justification of individuals is actually in order to enlist them as part of that putting to rights onto the project. Which means of course that the Gospel is about justice. And I've often said, 'Unless you've got justice in the middle of your picture of justification, you're not doing the Pauline thing.' So yes, it's juridical, but it's juridical because the world does need sorting out. It's not juridical because God really is the sort of God who thinks everything is basically like a law court, where people have been very naughty and he needs to wag his finger at them.<sup>177</sup>

Jeffery *et al.*'s (2007b) primary response to Wright's criticism of their work during the controversy was to highlight what they maintain are the differences between the objectives and methodology of 'classical systematic theology', which was Jeffery *et al.*'s stated task, and 'the kind of narrative theology project in which Wright has been engaged for so many years' (para 6). They maintain that some of Wright's methodological criticisms of them have therefore failed to appreciate the differences between the two tasks. Also, concerning Wright's specific criticisms of their exegesis of relevant Pauline texts used to inform their understanding of penal substitution, Jeffery *et al.* correctly noted that Wright's own position is part of an ongoing debate within Pauline scholarship concerning the reception of the so-called 'New Perspective on Paul'.<sup>178</sup> They therefore remarked that:

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<sup>177</sup> This view echoes the sentiment that Jonathan Bartley expressed in his interview in terms of the differences between retributive and restorative justice which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>178</sup> Most commentators on the New Perspective on Paul acknowledge the significance of the work of E.P. Sanders and his book entitled *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) (Meek 2001; Das 2001; Wright 2004; Barclay 2010). Wright (2004), for example, argues that the New Perspective stands in a 'Reformed tradition [which] found in Paul a view of Jewish law which was far more positive than Lutheran exegesis had assumed' (71). Wright maintains that what E.P. Sanders' understanding of the Judaism Paul was expressing 'was not, basically, a religion of self-help moralism [...], but was a religion in which the keeping of the law mattered not because people were trying to earn their membership in God's people but because they were eager to demonstrate it. Law-keeping was not part of "getting in" but of "staying in". [...] Keeping the law within the "staying in" mode is what he

Interpretation of these epistles must reckon with the ongoing debates over the so-called New Perspective on Paul, in which Wright himself is a central figure. [...] Wright is clearly dissatisfied, and wants to make his reading of the Bible our controlling hermeneutic; anything short of this he deems 'sub-biblical'. But to base our case solely on a position that continues to be hotly debated in New Testament Studies would have been counterproductive. As it is, our aim was that our exegesis should stand 'regardless of which path [of Pauline interpretation] is taken with respect to the issues of recent controversy' (para 8 and 10).<sup>179</sup>

In his interview, Mike Ovey also specifically challenged Wright's understanding of penal substitution in his foregrounding and prioritising the role of Israel/Abraham over Jesus. He observed that:

I think it's intriguing that you've quoted the 'Israel is the answer to the fall' bit because I prefer to say that the Lord Jesus is the answer to the fall. And actually I'd say that the biblical narrative is two Adams, not Adam/Israel. [...] But I think the point that people sometimes make about Tom Wright is that he seems to put Israel and Abraham in the foreground in a way that the Bible doesn't necessarily in terms of its overall strategy. [...] Paul does not treat Jesus as a new improved Abraham. He treats Jesus as the second Adam and

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[Sanders] calls "covenantal nomism" [...]. This proposal cuts most deeply against Lutheran readings of Paul which have been common coin in New Testament scholarship for a long time [...]' (70). Barclay (2010) similarly maintained that the 'past generation of Pauline scholars, impressed by Ed Sanders' rather Protestant configuration of Second Temple Judaism, has attempted to turn against previous caricatures of the Jewish tradition as legalism by insisting that early Christianity and its contemporary Judaism were both "religions of grace"' (179). Wright concludes that the New Perspective on Paul's understanding of law creates 'a problem for those who think that the key issue in his [Paul's] theology is "keeping rules" over against "trusting God"' (2004: 75). Wright is one of the scholars who indeed holds to the position that the New Perspective on Paul has significant implications for our understanding of evangelical theologies of the atonement (such as penal substitution) which he believes have been constructed within another (traditional-Lutheran) perspective and his essay (Wright 2007) is an example of this. See a further discussion of this issue in Holmes (2008: 280).

<sup>179</sup> Jeffery *et al.* (2007b) also rejected Wright's allegation that they failed to locate their understanding of penal substitution within the Old Testament narrative of Israel and the Abrahamic covenant citing examples from their book to support their position on this issue (para 4). Wright again responded to these claims in his interview when he maintained: 'the fundamental note, which again is just embarrassingly absent from that book *Pierced for our Transgressions* is the note that God's plan of salvation is the Israel plan. And there is something deeply Marcionite about that whole school of thought, and the narrative is set out in *Pierced for our Transgressions*. I remember reading it and thinking, "Oh my goodness I didn't expect to see it stated so starkly." Here are human beings, they sin, God sends Jesus, punishes their sin in Jesus, that's alright then. Oh, and the Old Testament gives us a few sort of types and shadows in advance, things about it. That just isn't good enough. And a movement [conservative evangelical advocates of penal substitution such as Jeffery *et al.*] I mean it wouldn't matter if they didn't claim to be biblical. [...] But these are people who claim to be biblical and they're not doing business with the biblical tradition. Which says "The way that God saves the world is through the people of Abraham." And the people of Abraham coming to their climax in Jesus Christ. And Mathew, Mark, Luke and John tell the story of Jesus precisely as the fulfilment of the story of Israel. Which in turn, precisely as the fulfilment of the story of creation and the dealing with the problems.'



that line of thought. And it's not of course that Tom Wright ever denies the significance of atonement Christology or anything like that. But I find myself thinking that it is backgrounded when it should be foregrounded. And that Abraham is foregrounded when he should be backgrounded.

## Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the controversy and critically analysed some of the main theological arguments forwarded by the protagonists. As was argued at the outset of this thesis, individual aspects of religion are used by religious collectives in order to define and distinguish themselves from other collectives. These aspects of religion include formal beliefs and doctrines, ethical standards, forms of governance, forms of ritual and the nature of religious experiences (McGuire 1992: 15-20; Olson 1993: 38). A detailed analysis of the controversy surrounding the doctrine of the atonement and penal substitution shows that at the beginning of the twenty-first century many conservative British evangelical figures were of the view that faith in the penal substitutionary model of the atonement was a *sine qua non* characteristic of anyone who wished to be labelled as an evangelical.

The many hostile responses to Chalke and Mann's original book offer a clear example of key figures within a religious group forcefully laying claim to an element of belief as being essential to a group's identity. However, the theoretical framework which has been developed in the early chapters of this thesis allows for the fact that claims of this nature are frequently contested (MacIntyre 1989). This happens whenever such claims are resisted by another section within a religious group. This resistance is in turn likely to trigger more discussion and debate. The next chapter will continue this analysis by focusing upon the particular motivations and strategies

employed by the various protagonists in the controversy in their attempt to establish their positions.

## **Chapter 5 – The Doctrinal Controversy Among British Evangelicals During the Mid-2000s Part 2: Motivations and Strategies**

In continuing to examine the doctrinal controversy which occurred among British evangelicals during the mid-2000s concerning the doctrine of the atonement and penal substitution, the first section of this chapter considers the motivations which were embraced by some of the key protagonists in the controversy. The second section will contribute to our understanding of the manner in which the contestation in the recent controversy occurred by focusing specifically upon the strategies employed by the protagonists during the course of the controversy. The final section provides a series of concluding observations based on this analysis concerning the ongoing status and function of the doctrine of the atonement, and of penal substitution in particular, in the construction of British evangelical identity.

### **5.1 Motivations**

#### **5.1.1 Critics of Penal Substitution – Social Gospel Evangelism**

When discussing his motivations for writing *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003), Steve Chalke acknowledged that one of his primary motivations was to emphasise the ‘social ethic’ he believes Jesus taught and embodied during his life. This theme is, to Chalke’s mind, too often neglected by many conservative evangelicals in favour of focusing primarily upon the death of Jesus and the salvific benefits attached to his death for individual believers. In his interview Chalke explained that in his book he hoped to set out

a vision of who Jesus is, and the scope of his work. [...] [To] show that he is socio-political, to show that he has an ethic for life. That his work was not just about his death, nor even his death and resurrection [...] so that his words, his attitudes, his example, and his teaching, become the stuff, the core materials, from which we discover how to live and how to work today.

Alan Mann, co-author of *The Lost Message of Jesus*, further explained that Chalke's motivation for emphasising the social ethic of Jesus' Gospel is linked to the work which the Oasis organisation (which was founded by Chalke) undertakes. In its work, Oasis focuses upon the education and health of some of the poorest and most marginalised people in the community.<sup>180</sup> Thus Mann suggested that it is not surprising that in their book, he and Chalke sought to promote Jesus as 'somebody who was active socially and not just an evangelist preaching to people to get saved.' David Hilborn further located Chalke's social justice motivation within a tradition of British evangelicalism which has sought, since seminal events such as the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization,<sup>181</sup> to encourage evangelicals to rediscover an important aspect of the 'activism' arm of Bebbington's fourfold schema of British evangelical identity.

As Tom Wright noted in his interview however, many conservative evangelicals have been traditionally sceptical of prioritising social-action initiatives.<sup>182</sup> As it transpired during the recent controversy, individuals and institutions who

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<sup>180</sup> For some details concerning the social justice initiatives undertaken by the Oasis organisation see <http://www.oasisuk.org/about>.

<sup>181</sup> It was at the 'Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974, when many evangelicals pledged to re-establish their commitment to social action' (Hilborn 1997: 188).

<sup>182</sup> Previously Wright (2008) has similarly observed that: 'I think, actually, that the real problem behind the sound and fury in 'conservative Evangelical' circles about the work of Steve Chalke and Brian MacLaren [sic] has [...] [been] about the fact that Chalke and MacLaren think the gospel is something that has to be *done*, on the street, and not merely believed' (14). Wright goes on to suggest that conservative evangelicals have often feared that this type of conception of the Gospel is overly political and akin to a form of 'works-righteousness'. However Wright responds to such fears thus: 'Well, yes it does mean political involvement [...]; and no, it doesn't mean works-righteousness. We work for God's kingdom, not in order to earn our salvation [...], but because of all that Jesus was and did' (14).

continued to promote a more introspective mindset were therefore, unsurprisingly, some of the fiercest critics of Chalke and *The Lost Message of Jesus*. Wright observed:

But I think the real problem was that Steve was saying [through the book] that the Gospel is about God doing justice and mercy in the wider world and not just about saving souls. And so I think that the huge ‘hoo haa’ about [penal] substitution is actually displacement activity because of the dislike among the post-Thatcher evangelical generation and it’s – Oak Hill [College, London,] and it’s Moore College, Sydney – and [their] dislike for anything that has any political ramification at all.<sup>183</sup>

### **5.1.2 Critics of Penal Substitution – Widening the Content of the Gospel Proclaimed by Evangelicals beyond the Death of Jesus and Penal Substitution**

Following on from this first motivation, Alan Mann explained that the publishers and authors of *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003) were also prompted by the desire to widen and extend the content of the Gospel being proclaimed by evangelicals beyond focussing solely upon the death and resurrection of Jesus. Mann outlined that *The Lost Message of Jesus*

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<sup>183</sup> Other interviewees, including David Bebbington and Stephen Holmes, noted the contact and influence over the years of Moore College, the conservative Anglican evangelical theological college in Sydney, Australia, on conservative English Anglican evangelical academic institutions such as Oak Hill College, London. For example, Mike Ovey, the current Principal of Oak Hill College, lectured at Moore College from 1995-8 and one of Ovey’s co-authors of *Pierced for Our Transgression* (2007), Andrew Sach, engaged in a six-month student exchange at Moore College while he was studying at Oak Hill. Other high-profile British evangelicals, such as Alister McGrath, have also lectured at Moore College. David Bebbington expressed the view in his interview that Moore College theologians have been heavily influenced by old Princeton theology, describing it as ‘one of the chief outposts of that point of view.’ As a result, Bebbington linked Mike Ovey’s insistence on penal substitution as being ‘the litmus test of orthodoxy on the atonement and possibly even orthodoxy overall’ in terms of the influence of the Princeton atonement theology Ovey would have been exposed to while at Moore College. Bebbington concluded: ‘That, I’m sure, does lie behind the case sketched by Mike Ovey. After all, he is a Moore College person.’ Michael Jensen (2010), who presently lectures at Moore College and who is also the son the current Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Peter Jensen, has recently spoken very positively of the Princeton theologians, in particular of Hodge and Warfield: ‘They [the Princeton theologians] were redoubtable. Warfield in particular remains an under-rated scholar. Yet his scholarly achievement – and personal integrity – was immense’ (para 32).

was really a book about the life of Jesus based on the observation that probably [...] we'd got into the habit of talking about the Gospel purely from [...] a perspective of Easter and the Cross [...]. And there was kind of, 'Where's all the bit that goes before [...]'?

Derek Tidball similarly revealed that Chalke had informed him that one of his motivations for writing the book was 'to release what he saw as an authentic Gospel message that could engage with contemporary society. [...] [N]ot an old evangelistic message, but a wider evangelistic message that leads to social transformation.' Stuart Murray Williams expressed the view that Chalke's desire to broaden the content and language of the Gospel being proclaimed to include focusing upon issues such as social justice, was grounded in the awareness street-level evangelists and social activists (such as Chalke) have acquired of the societal changes which have accompanied contemporary cultural phenomena, which includes the demise of Christendom.<sup>184</sup> This awareness demands an acknowledgment that traditional theological language and

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<sup>184</sup> 'Christendom' is often employed by scholars such as Murray [Williams] (2004) as a convenient term to describe the cultural phenomenon whereby Christianity and the Christian church has a central, powerful and influential status in all spheres of public and private life. Pursuant to Christendom, the Christian church and religion are regarded as being at the social and cultural 'centre'. In contrast, the term 'post-Christendom' refers to the transitional phase (which Murray Williams asserts Western countries like Britain are currently experiencing) whereby Christianity is moving, perhaps rapidly, from the social and cultural centre to the margins. It describes the situation where Christianity and the Christian church is coming to no longer possess a central, powerful and influential status in the public and private life of people living in countries like Britain (Murray [Williams] 2005: 29). So for example, Murray Williams maintained in his interview that one of the results of post-Christendom, compared to the Christendom era, and the cultural marginalisation of Christianity that accompanies it, is that: 'the biblical story and language just isn't known to a large number of people in the UK and Western society generally. And the traditional language used to tell the story, the traditional theological terms and concepts are simply not familiar in the way they would have been 25, 30 years ago.' In terms of Christendom as a time span or epoch, the beginnings of this epoch are usually associated with the reception of Christianity as the official state religion of the Roman Empire. Thus Oliver O'Donovan (1996), for example, nominates the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, which provided religious toleration for Christians in the Roman Empire, as a convenient starting point (195 and 244). Opinions differ as to whether the Christendom era is in the process of ending or has already ended. O'Donovan, for instance, maintains that Christendom has ended and suggests 1791, the date of the First Amendment to the US Constitution, which prohibits the making of laws with respect to an established religion, as a possible end date, although other dates, such as those associated with the French Revolution of 1789-99 or World War I, 1914-18, have also been suggested (195 and 244). As outlined above, Murray [Williams] (2004) however maintains the view that Christendom is still in the process of ending. This is because he believes that, 'We are not quite there yet. We are in a lengthy transitional phase. Christendom took centuries to develop and will not collapse overnight' (3).

concepts which have been relied upon in the past, such as evangelistic content framed in narrowly focused terms of judgement, salvation, heaven and hell, are simply not familiar to members of contemporary society and therefore different forms of expression of the content of the Gospel are required if the church is to have an ongoing relevance in our cultural context.

Concerning the problems Murray Williams envisages regarding penal substitution in a post-Christendom context, he has elsewhere asserted that:

Penal substitution may have fitted comfortably into this [Christendom] cultural context and into the theology that undergirded the role of the Church in Christendom, but this does not mean it is well suited to our very different context. Indeed, retaining this model of atonement may seriously hinder us from identifying and disavowing other aspects of the Christendom era that hinder our witness in post-Christendom. [...] [W]e need a model of atonement that is not only true to biblical teaching but relevant to contemporary culture. (Murray [Williams] 2005: 32)

As to why Murray Williams believes that penal substitution fitted well within the Christendom context, he asserts that while it draws upon juridical imagery which is present in the Bible, penal substitution is

a later development [constructed during the Reformation and post-Reformation era] of the satisfaction theory [of Anselm in the eleventh century], albeit using forensic and juridical imagery [as opposed to feudal imagery] [...] and deeply influenced by the cultural context within which it was developed. This context was the Christendom system, in which the church was powerful and successful but also coercive and sometimes violent (31-32).<sup>185</sup>

Advocates of penal substitution, such as Jeffery *et al.* (2007), have specifically responded to Murray Williams' position. They firstly rejected Murray Williams' view that penal substitution constitutes a relatively late doctrinal development in terms of

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<sup>185</sup> It should be noted that Murray Williams' position as to the development of juridical models of the atonement is broadly supported by the analysis conducted in Chapter 2 of this thesis and by the work of other scholars of the history of the development of atonement models, for example Paul Fiddes (1989: 9-10).

the history of the doctrines of the church. Instead, they affirm what they maintain are the biblical origins of penal substitution (Jeffery *et al.* 2007: 33ff). Secondly, Jeffery *et al.* assert: 'The prevailing world view will not necessarily determine what Christians believe, for Christians have often been those who swim strongly against the tide' (220). Mike Ovey reinforced this point in his interview by suggesting that programmes which seek to contextually tailor the form and content of the Gospel can lead, in his mind, to a 'point at which you actually aren't bringing the message any more to the world. You're simply playing back what the world already thinks to itself.' Jeffery *et al.* (2007) therefore maintained that from their perspective:

The key question, however, is not whether ideas found in penal substitution are also present within contemporary culture, but whether they are found in Scripture. [...] [T]he correspondence or lack of it between a given doctrine and human cultural ideas is entirely irrelevant to the question of whether that doctrine is biblical. What counts is whether it is taught in Scripture'. (220-221)

Finally, David Hilborn also challenged whether traditional theological language and ideas, including those associated with penal substitution, are as culturally irrelevant or problematic in our particular contemporary context as Chalke, Murray Williams and other critics have suggested. In his interview, Hilborn maintained that:

I actually believe that to see Christ as the one who bears the penalty for human sin is the ultimate expression of justice for the poor [...] it is the most just expression of liberation for the poor because it is instrumental. It achieves their liberation [...]. There is, you know, assuaging of guilt. There is a propitiation for sins. There's expiation and propitiation – something gets done. Something gets cleansed. Something gets erased. [...] I do believe that penal substitution offers that concrete objective atonement and that is good news for the poor ultimately.



### **5.1.3 Critics of Penal Substitution – Seeking to Overcome the Guilt and the Image of God and Humanity Promoted by Penal Substitution**

Another recurring point raised by critics of penal substitution concerned the desire to challenge what they regarded as the impact common presentations of penal substitution have on people concerning personal guilt. In addition, critics were also concerned about what they believe is the image of God and, in particular, the image of how God views humanity which they claim penal substitution promotes and sustains. Steve Chalke explained that in the criticisms he made during the controversy

what I had in mind was the kind of preaching that scares people [...]. Preaching about God's wrath and anger for them, which has them cowered in a corner, running scared. Preaching that, in my view, seriously misrepresents the God of the Bible. And in the case of people who are not yet Christians, turning their backs on the teaching of the church.

Tom Wright also discussed conversations on this issue he had had with Chalke during the controversy:

Steve had been saying, 'The trouble is that a lot of evangelicals are just badly damaged by this hammering away that you're a wicked, horrible sinner. You're a terrible person, etc. [...]. And that, 'That is not the way to say – that God so loved the world etc.' And even though of course there is a dealing of sin, it's that psychological bullying which is really terrifying [...]. That's the kind of world that we're in, where in fact a lot of evangelicals have suffered exactly what Steve [Chalke] says. [People who] have got the vision of God as a bullying tyrant who is determined to have somebody's blood and doesn't much mind whose it is. And guess what, here's his innocent son who says, 'That will do.' And who [therefore] just find that God a horrible monster.'<sup>186</sup>

Advocates of penal substitution responded to what they maintained are the misguided and caricatured presentation of penal substitution which undergirds this criticism. Derek Tidball commented that responding to this type of criticism was one

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<sup>186</sup> Similar concerns were raised by Alan Mann, Jonathan Bartley and Stuart Murray Williams in their interviews.

of his primary motivations in writing the paper he presented at the 2005 Atonement Symposium concerning the pastoral benefits of penal substitution (Tidball 2008b). He explained that, rather than penal substitution making people feel guilty, 'I grew up understanding that it released people from guilt and gave them freedom.' Advocates of penal substitution also reacted to criticisms which were raised about the image of God which it was claimed results under penal substitution and, in particular, the allegation of penal substitution being akin to 'cosmic child abuse'. Mike Ovey, for example, suggested that any atonement model (and arguably the Incarnation itself) which ultimately results in God the Father being conceived of as having willed a course of action which would ultimately result in Jesus' death, would be subject to this criticism.

Ovey commented that

the obvious question to my mind was that if God sent his Son at all to die, does it matter whether it's for a penal substitutionary purpose or for any other kind of purpose? If I sent my 16 year old son knowing that he's going to die and all the rest of it, and leave him in the hands of maniacs, then we'd say quite meaningfully that that would be abusive conduct. So I couldn't see, simply from a tactical point of view [...] even if Steve had been right on the theology, I couldn't see that it offered us any advantage in the proclamation of the gospel full stop.

#### **5.1.4 Critics of Penal Substitution – Concern Regarding the Impact Penal Substitution can Have on Wider Criminal Justice Policy and the Role of Violence**

Jonathan Bartley of Ekklesia drew particular attention to the fact that he believes that the particular model(s) of the atonement that are embraced by people can have a significant impact on how they envisage how secular criminal justice systems should operate. Bartley argued that for Ekklesia and those of a more Anabaptist tradition:

One of the things that we work on is restorative justice and to me restorative justice is absolutely fundamental to the Gospel. It's not primarily about seeing

criminal justice as punishment but seeing [criminal justice] primarily about how do you make things right again [...]? Now this is completely alien to some evangelicals who say our criminal justice system will be the most Christian when it punishes in the most clean way and delivers the just dessert for someone who's committed a crime. [...] One atonement theory will take you one way, another will take you another. [...] [Y]our view of atonement shapes your whole social ethic and your whole political ethic.

In his book *The Nonviolent Atonement*, J. Denny Weaver (2001) similarly argues that there is an undeniably direct link between what he terms 'satisfaction atonement'<sup>187</sup> and systems of retributive justice. He argues that satisfaction atonement 'assumes that God's justice requires compensatory punishment for evil deeds committed' (3).

Pursuant to the dominant Western systems of criminal justice 'to "do justice" means to punish criminal perpetrators appropriately. "Appropriately" means that the more serious the offence, the greater the penalty (punishment) to be imposed [...]' (2). In his interview, Stuart Murray Williams explained that one of the things he tried to explore in the seminar he was invited to conduct at the 2005 Atonement Symposium concerned the implications of penal substitution for judicial policy. He expressed the view that penal substitution 'seems to me to lead naturally to a penal and retributive understanding of justice and doesn't make it easy to explore rehabilitative or restorative approaches.' He further commented however that the participants in his seminar were resistant to considering the wider ethical and social consequences that might proceed from a penal substitutionary atonement theology: 'they just wouldn't go there and weren't interested in pursuing that.'

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<sup>187</sup> As can be seen from Weaver's following definition of 'satisfaction atonement', it is essentially a conflating of the honour satisfaction and penal substitution models discussed in Chapter 2: 'Satisfaction atonement assumes that the sin of humankind against God has earned the penalty of death, but that Jesus satisfied the offended honour of God on behalf or took the place of sinful humankind and bore their punishment or satisfied the required penalty on their behalf' (Weaver 2001: 3).

Mike Ovey also identified a concern which he has detected among critics of penal substitution concerning the related issue of violence and crucicentric understanding of the doctrine of the atonement. Ovey observed:

The contribution of the sort of much more Mennonite/Anabaptist contribution of Stuart Murray Williams I think was again fascinating because, certainly with Stuart, I've not heard him frequently, but from what I've heard, what I detect very strongly, is a problem with violence. So I think the theodicy question is there as well.

Ovey is correct in his assessment that many evangelical and non-evangelical theologians have raised the issue of the problem of violence associated with Jesus' death and the various interpretations of the significance of Jesus' death. J. Denny Weaver (2001), for example, has asserted that:

Atonement theology starts with violence, namely the killing of Jesus. The commonplace assumption is that something good happened, namely the salvation of sinners, when or because Jesus was killed. It follows that the doctrine of the atonement then explains how and why Christians believe that the death of Jesus – the killing of Jesus – resulted in the salvation of sinful humanity. (2)

Anthony Bartlett (2001) also maintains that penal substitution is not alone in the context of the other major atonement models with respect to validating violence. Bartlett's study focuses upon the way in which he maintains

the grammar or set of logical rules by which the Christian event of salvation has been understood in the history of the Christian tradition [...] shows that this grammar is infected or formed by violence, so that violence is in turn validated by it. [...] [A]ll these usages [atonement models] in respect of the Crucified imply an exchange value in Christ's death, whereby something is gained in return for the life lost, and by means of an eternal order or economy that demands it [...]. (2-4)<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Liberal Roman Catholic theologian James Alison (2003) has specifically criticised the way in which he believes atonement theories, such as honour satisfaction and penal substitution, promote retribution and vengeance on the part of God (22). He is also highly critical of the way in which he believes these models of the atonement also neglect a crucial element of God's 'anti-violence' message and self-

### 5.1.5 Advocates of Penal Substitution – Feeling ‘Under Attack’ and Counterattacking to ‘Defend the Faith’

In his interview, British evangelical historian David Bebbington explained that he is of the opinion that conservative evangelicals, such as Mike Ovey, would have viewed Steve Chalke’s (2003) book and his subsequent publications on penal substitution as making a serious attack on a core plank of their faith.<sup>189</sup> For Bebbington, Ovey would have ‘thought that the Cross is at risk. It has to be defended at all costs, and this is the best way of defending the whole deposit of faith.’ Indeed, in his interview, Ovey talked in these terms. For example, he suggested that ‘an attack on the atonement, or what is perceived as an attack on the atonement, is perceived as undermining the grace of God.’ Ovey then went on to discuss why criticism of penal substitution undermines not only evangelical identity but even undermines primal existential issues such as his understanding of himself and God.<sup>190</sup> Concerning why the atonement and penal substitution are so essential to his conservative form of evangelical theology and piety, Ovey responded:

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disclosure to the world by making out ‘that Jesus’ resurrection didn’t reveal anything new at all. It merely accomplished a deal whereby someone who was remote and angry remained remote and angry, but created an exception for those lucky enough to be covered by the blood of his Son. [...] I want to suggest, this is not the case: Jesus’ resurrection did reveal something which was new – not new to God, but new to us, Jesus revealed that God had and has nothing at all to do with violence, or death, or the order of this world. These are *our* problems and mask *our* conceptions of God, of law and order and so forth’ (22-23). A similar conclusion was reached by Raymund Schwager (1999) when he observed that: ‘The saving dimension of the Easter message, and the revelation of God contained in it, can be clarified from yet another angle. In the parable of the wicked vinegrowers (Mark 12:1-12 and parallels) a lord is presented who at first acts with unfathomable goodness, in that, after the rejection and killing of several servants, he even risks his own son. The goodness however comes to an end, for after the murder of his beloved son it is transformed into retribution, and the violent vinegrowers are in their turn killed. But the heavenly in his Easter “judgement” acted differently [...]. Even the murder of his son did not provoke in him a reaction of vengeful retribution, but he sent the risen one back with the message “Peace be with you!” (Luke 24:36; see also John 20:19, 26)’ (135-6).

<sup>189</sup> In his interview Bebbington explained that he has previously worked with Mike Ovey and thus felt confident about expressing an opinion concerning how Ovey would have reacted, in all likelihood, to Chalke’s criticisms of penal substitution.

<sup>190</sup> This is primarily due to the fact that penal substitution appears to effectively provide the conceptual framework within which Ovey understands the whole of salvation history including: the nature of God as Creator; humans being created in God’s image who then become estranged from God as a result of their rebellion against God’s laws at the Fall; etc. This is a narrative within which Ovey would therefore locate himself as a fallen (but redeemed) created being.

Because it's there that I see God's love demonstrated. So the understanding of the proposition of 1 John 4 – that God is love – is instantiated [...] in this: that God gave his son to die for me. And if that is undermined then both our view of God and our view of ourselves, in some ways, is fundamentally altered. [...] And I'd say that the question of identity and penal substitution is fundamental, both in terms of who I understand God to be and who I understand myself to be.

As a result of the significant theological and identity issues which are bound up with penal substitution, Ovey explained it was unsurprising that like-minded people rallied around the cause of defending penal substitution.

Critics of penal substitution in the recent controversy similarly sensed that the advocates of penal substitution displayed feelings consistent with being under attack and that they therefore needed to, in effect, counterattack. Steve Chalke explained that he believed that advocates of penal substitution reacted with hostility against him 'because, in their view, I was driving a dagger right into the heart of Christian faith – the Cross. For them, penal substitution explains the cross without remainder. For some, signing up to penal substitution as "the way" of understanding the Cross has become mandatory.' Stuart Murray Williams also noted that in the questions and responses of some advocates of penal substitution who confronted him at the 2004 Atonement Debate convened by the EA, 'there was a lot of anger and people were almost spitting at times. [...] I was still quite surprised by the level of vitriol.' He explained that there clearly seemed to be a sense of outrage among many present that people, such as himself and Chalke, who identified themselves as being 'evangelicals' were questioning what, for many, was at the very core of their faith and evangelicalism itself.

Some critics of penal substitution also felt that the advocates seemed to be locating their concerns regarding the criticisms being made about penal substitution

within a broader contemporary criticism of evangelicalism and even Christianity *per se*. Jonathan Bartley explained that he is of the opinion that among contemporary conservative evangelicals in Britain

there's a very large section feeling that their faith is under attack. That they are being marginalised. That Britain is losing its Christian identity. That they are being discriminated against. And even some people are using the phrase that they're 'being persecuted'. And it's a kind of 'batten down the hatches' siege mentality. And it is creating a hardening within certain sections of evangelicalism [reflected in] a doctrinal response which says, 'We've got to defend the faith.'

Evidence to support the conclusion concerning the validity of this motivation on the part of some British evangelicals can be located in comments made by George Carey (b. 1935), the former evangelical Archbishop of Canterbury (Tidball 1994: 7).<sup>191</sup> In a pamphlet entitled *I'm Not Ashamed*, which was distributed as part of the Not Ashamed Campaign,<sup>192</sup> Carey (2010) used this exact phrase when he asserted that Britain's Christian

legacy is under attack. In spite of having contributed so much to our civilization and providing its foundation, the Christian Faith is in danger of being stealthily and subtly brushed aside. [...] So, it appears that flowing from a combination of well-meaning political correctness, multiculturalism and overt opposition to Christianity, a new climate, hostile to our country's tradition and history, is developing. (1-2)

Jonathan Bartley publically, however, rejected this assertion arguing instead that, in fact:

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<sup>191</sup> George Carey was the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1991-2002.

<sup>192</sup> The Not Ashamed Campaign (2010) describes itself as seeking to provide 'an opportunity for Christians across the UK to stand together and speak up for the Christian foundation of our nation, motivated by the conviction that Jesus Christ is good news not just for individuals or for the church but for society as a whole. Indeed, He is the only true hope for our nation.' (para 1)

Since 2005, when we [Ekklesia] first predicted the growth in claims of 'persecution', we have been closely examining individual cases and what lies behind them [and] have found no evidence to back up the claim of the Not Ashamed Campaign that Christians as a group are being systematically marginalised in Britain. We have found consistent evidence, however, of Christians misleading people and exaggerating what is really going on, as well as treating other Christians, those of other faith and those of no faith in discriminatory ways. (BBC Staff Writers 2010: para 33-34)

In his interview, Tom Wright referred to the reaction of conservative advocates of penal substitution during the controversy as being a symptom of what he termed the 'Thatcherisation of English evangelicalism' since the 1980s.<sup>193</sup> Wright's use of the term 'Thatcherisation' is an obvious reference to the former British Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who held office in this capacity from 1979-1990. The use of this term here, with respect to tendencies within sections of conservative British evangelicalism, would not seem to be primarily directed at the specific content of Thatcher's policy platform (which embraced right-wing and economically rationalist political priorities, such as deregulation, privatisation and the rolling back of the welfare state). Rather, the focus is upon what came to be regarded as Thatcher's personal and ethical approach to politics which promoted moral absolutism and a shunning of consensus in favour of an aggressive and uncompromising assertion of her ideological convictions (Robertson 1993: 459-60). In his interview, Wright further elaborated upon what he was referring to in this regard

the rather fierce right wing, and often I'm afraid, rather well heeled evangelicalism, that is now represented by St Helen's Bishopsgate [London] and now a bit by All Souls' Langham Place [London], which used to be right in the middle as it were, but it's now gone more that way as well,

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<sup>193</sup> For a discussion of the tensions which Margaret Thatcher had with some senior Church of England figures during her administration, including the former Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, and the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, in light of her government's policies on issues such as rollback of the welfare state, industrial reforms and the nuclear deterrent see Butt (1990) and Gladwin (1990).



[represented] by Reform, by the Proclamation Trust, etc., which has also picked up other key *cause célèbre* [in addition to aggressively defending penal substitutionary atonement] like anti-women preaching, teaching etc. which is pretty fierce in some quarters now.'

One aspect which is intriguing about this type motivation of British evangelicals feeling 'under attack' and needing to 'counterattack', concerns some of the similarities, in terms of the sentiment and rhetoric displayed, with that of the North American fundamentalists during the 1920s. As was discussed in Chapter 1, the fundamentalists were a complex coalition who fought against modernists and liberalism (particularly with respect to higher biblical criticism) within their denominations and against the teaching of Darwinism and evolution in schools (Harris 2008: 29ff; George 2007: 280; McIntire 2001: 475). Concerning the fundamentalist-modernist controversies, a sermon by the Presbyterian minister Clarence Edward Macartney (1922) entitled 'Shall Unbelief Win?', delivered in response to Harold Emerson Fosdick's sermon 'Shall the Fundamentalists Win?' (1922), captures these sentiments. Concerning the feeling of being under attack from modernist theologians, Macartney firstly observed that 'more and more there is a tendency to brand as illiberal, medieval and narrow any man [sic] who differs from the current of popular religious thought, and declares it to be non-Christian in its tendencies' (3). He goes on to talk in terms of:

[T]he menace of the rationalistic and modernist movement in Protestant Christianity. The movement is slowly secularizing the Church, and if permitted to go unchecked and unchallenged, will ere long produce in our churches a new kind of Christianity, a Christianity without worship, without God, and without Jesus Christ. (23)

Concerning the response that Macartney believed was required of those who would resist the menacing modernist attacks upon Protestant Christianity, he argued:

I do not believe in letting them hold the field all to themselves. I believe that in this day one of the greatest contributions that a man [sic] can make to the success of the Gospel is to contend earnestly and intelligently and in a Christian spirit, but nevertheless, **CONTEND**, for the faith. (5)

In the following year the Princeton theologian J Gresham Machen (1923) similarly employed images of ‘conflict’ and ‘battle’ at the outset of his book *Christianity and Liberalism*, to describe what he perceived as the threat posed by liberal and modernist theological tendencies of the time:

In the sphere of religion, in particular, the present time is a time of conflict; the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called "modernism" or "liberalism." (2)

In terms of the subject matter that is at the heart of the controversy among British evangelicals, it is also intriguing to note that both Macartney and Machen identified the doctrine of the atonement (and in Machen’s case, an expressly penal substitutionary atonement theology) as one of the key theological doctrines that were under attack from modernists. Reflecting the atonement theology of previous Princeton theologians identified in this thesis, Machen attacks liberal theology for promoting a subjective atonement theology. He also defends penal substitution by making the orthodoxy assertion, declaring that with respect to liberal theology:

[I]t is not surprising that it presents an entirely different account of the way of salvation. Liberalism finds salvation [...] in man; Christianity finds it in an act of God. The difference with regard to the way of salvation concerns, in the first place, the basis of salvation in the redeeming work of Christ. According to Christian belief, Jesus is our Savior, not by virtue of what He said, not even

by virtue of what He was, but by what He did. He is our Savior, not because He has inspired us to live the same kind of life that He lived, but because He took upon Himself the dreadful guilt of our sins and bore it instead of us on the cross. Such is the Christian conception of the Cross of Christ. It is ridiculed as being a ‘subtle theory of the atonement.’ In reality, it is the plain teaching of the word of God; we know absolutely nothing about an atonement that is not a vicarious atonement, for that is the only atonement of which the New Testament speaks. And this Bible doctrine is not intricate or subtle. (1923: 117)

#### **5.1.6 Advocates of Penal Substitution – Shoring up the Boundaries of what Constitutes Authentic British Evangelicalism in the Contemporary Context**

Commenting upon the historical situation in North American evangelicalism, James Hunter (1987) observed that

the pursuit of doctrinal integrity has consumed not only theologians and ministers but the vast number of those ordinary people calling themselves Evangelicals [...]. The issue here (and one common to all orthodoxies) is the issue of boundaries, the theological criteria determining the range and the limits of acceptability. Such criteria provide a test for group membership: those who adhere belong; those who do not adhere entirely or on particular points do not belong. (19)<sup>194</sup>

When reflecting upon the recent controversy in Britain, David Hilborn similarly suggested that one of the important motivations for some advocates of penal substitution was a type of ‘shoring up’ of what they maintain are the boundaries of what constitutes authentic British evangelicalism. Hilborn noted that one of the practical challenges evangelicalism faces is determining where the parameters of evangelicalism lie and identifying who defines what these parameters are. He noted that for evangelicalism ‘there’s no magisterium of evangelical faith and that in itself

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<sup>194</sup> Anthony Cohen (1985) has similarly observed: ‘By definition, the boundary marks the beginning and the end of a community. [...] [T]he boundary encapsulates the identity of the community [...]. Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished’ (12).

[is] a problem. Who arbitrates these things? [...] How does the evangelical community self identify? How does it police its borders?’ In the course of attempting to deal with this challenge during the controversy in the mid-2000s, Hilborn maintained that conservative evangelicals in their advocacy of penal substitution seemed to be assuming the role of being ‘dogmaticians’. These advocates of penal substitution seemed to be primarily motivated and concerned ‘about ensuring the purity of the evangelical constituency’ and getting ‘the community definition right in respect of the great figures of the past who have defined it in a particular [reformed and conservative evangelical] way’. Some critics of penal substitution who were interviewed made a similar observation. Jonathan Bartley noted that when criticism arises about certain issues, perceived by some conservative evangelicals as core defining issues (such as penal substitution), advocates acted as though they were obliged

to come out and rebut it in the same way they have to fight the battle over gays or whatever, because this is for the soul of the church as far as they're concerned. But what of course is interesting is [that] these lines, whilst there's a hardening within certain sections of evangelicalism, elsewhere the lines between evangelical and others are blurring and breaking down and you're getting – particularly in the areas of sexuality – you're getting the Courage Trust, open evangelicals, gay affirming evangelical groups, you know, [and] that's really blurring the lines between ‘us’ and ‘them’. So increasingly, when these issues arise, it won't be so clear about whether it's attack [from] within evangelicalism or attack from outside.

Intriguing similarities can again be identified between the situation documented here with respect to British evangelicalism at the beginning of the new millennium and the situation in North America. Roger Olson (2005) identified that among North American evangelicals debates about the proper boundaries of evangelicalism have been a recurring theme throughout its history (293). He explained that:

The issue of evangelical boundaries arises when an individual evangelical or group of evangelicals decides that some other individual or group among evangelicals is guilty of heresy and wishes to demonstrate to evangelicals with power (administrators, publishers and editors, influential executives of evangelical organisations) that limits have been transgressed and someone should be excluded (fined or not hired, not published, generally blackballed within the coalition). (294)

Olson also specifically identifies that the doctrine of the atonement, and whether one particular model of the atonement, such as penal substitution, should be a definite boundary (the preferred position of more conservative evangelicals) of authentic evangelical identity, will be one of these boundary-tension issues for evangelicals (296). Meanwhile, other more progressive evangelicals have generally been satisfied with ‘commitment to *salvation* through the Cross of Jesus Christ [as] part of Evangelicalism’s core and that various (not all) theories of the atonement are compatible with it’ (296). Olson also suggested that an observation like Bartley’s set out above, concerning the blurring of what constitutes authentic evangelicalism, becomes a priority of focus for many non-conservative evangelicals who maintain that evangelicalism does not require ‘definite, identifiable *boundaries* such as ‘inerrancy’ [...], only a strong *centre* of common commitment and experience. With such a powerful centre of gravity, the boundaries can [therefore] be fluid and flexible’ (295). Thus in a manner which has strong similarities with the situation which was revealed during the controversy in Britain in the mid-2000s, Olson concluded that

in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, the evangelical movement [in the United States] may be entering an identity crisis. Discussion of evangelical identity and boundaries is heating up as never before. Every creative and innovative proposal for reconsideration and reconstruction of traditional interpretations of doctrine is met by a conservative response that seeks to exclude; this is greeted by a reaction that decries the narrowing of boundaries.’ (295)

### **5.1.7 The Evangelical Alliance (UK) and its Involvement in the Controversy**

The two senior office holders of the EA during the controversy who were interviewed identified a number of motivations regarding the organisation's involvement in the controversy. Firstly, both of them suggested that providing a mechanism to resolve intra-evangelical disputes is simply part of the EA's function. Derek Tidball, for example, suggested that

we [the EA] are precisely a family who has rows from time to time, where the diverse members of the family won't always agree with each other but do come together and talk about it. So what do you expect an alliance to do but to try to bring two opposing [groups] together?

David Hilborn similarly reflected that he had formed the view that 'if somebody's going to try and manage what looks like becoming a rather quite nasty controversy, the EA is the body that should do that because historically it always has been one of its *raison d'être*.'

Hilborn identified a second motivation for the EA's involvement which related to seeking to clarify whether in fact the EA Basis of Faith implied penal substitution. As was discussed in Chapter 3, the relevant section of the EA's Basis of Faith, with respect to the atonement, which was operative at the time of the controversy, did not contain an explicitly penal substitutionary form of wording.<sup>195</sup> As was also discussed in the previous chapter, this situation was brought into focus due to the fact that Steve Chalke had openly criticised penal substitution yet he had indicated that he still subscribed to the EA Basis of Faith. Mike Ovey revealed that this aspect of the controversy created significant difficulties for him

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<sup>195</sup> Although it should also be recalled that Hilborn (2008) nonetheless maintains that penal substitution is implied by the wording and the process which resulted in the formulation of the atonement statement in the EA's Basis of Faith.

simply from an emotional and psychological point of view [it] is a very destabilising thing. So I think some of us who are classical conservatives, or whatever you want to call us, you find yourself in a position where you're being told not merely this [penal substitution] is wrong, that's sort of tragic. But it's who's telling you it is wrong. The level of attack on identity, not just our identity, but who-we-think-God-is kind of identity. And in effect who is the Evangelical Alliance? [...] It's not quite as authentically evangelical in our terms as we might have thought. [...] [B]ecause you're faced with people [such as Chalke] saying, 'In good faith, well I think it means this.' Whereas you [Ovey] were thinking, 'In good faith, I think it means that.'

Hilborn also reflected upon how the content of the developing dispute, namely understanding what evangelicals believe about the Cross and the significance of Jesus' death, and the place that this issue obviously has within British evangelical identity, was a further motivation for him in having the EA become involved in the controversy:

And so – also perhaps as Head of Theology at the EA, I thought, 'Well, if there is going to be a debate now about where we've come after thirty years of charismatic renewal, say thirty-five [years], whatever, may be more, then let it be on the Cross. If it's going to be about anything, let it be on the Cross.' And that's why I put so much effort into what I hope was a responsible debate, an international conference, a book.

Hilborn also asserted that part of the EA's ongoing internal dialogue with Steve Chalke during the controversy was motivated by a deeper pastoral concern about the perceived damage Chalke's criticisms were causing to many other British evangelicals who affirmed penal substitution. Hilborn explained that his aim was to make Chalke 'at least to be generous and open to the fact that there are others who claim the name of evangelical who affirm penal substitutionary atonement.' The observation must be made though, that Hilborn made no mention of a similar pastoral motivation to care for the needs of British evangelicals damaged by penal substitution in the manner discussed earlier in this chapter. Thus his position seemed to effectively amount to a call for tolerance for those people who had displayed intolerance about any criticism of

penal substitution or who had engaged even in a constructive discussion concerning some of the potential problems which might flow from this.

Derek Tidball also explained that one of the initial motivating factors for the EA's involvement concerned the high profile and standing of Steve Chalke and a misconception among many evangelicals concerning Chalke's role within the EA.

Tidball explained that:

Steve was simply a personal member, but people likely had the impression that he was much more closely linked, involved, which is one reason [...] I think why the EA did take focus of things. I found myself correcting folks up and down the country [who were saying], in effect, Steve was running the EA or whatever, which he wasn't. It became clear that something needed to be said because a high-profile evangelical leader was thought at least to have been denying what was a central understanding of the Cross from an evangelical viewpoint.

Ironically, this widespread view regarding Chalke's influence within the EA was in a sense more misconceived, even on the part of Tidball, than might be expected. This was due to the fact that, as was discussed in Chapter 4, in his interview Chalke explained that although Oasis is a member of the EA, he was not at the time of the controversy, nor is he now, a personal member of the EA:

I was never a personal member of the Evangelical Alliance. That was another strange thing in all of this. When I was put 'on trial' over my views, nobody ever stopped to ask me whether I was a personal member in the first place. However, I should point out that, though I wasn't a member, this wasn't because I was, in anyway, anti EA. In fact I worked very hard for the EA, I did lots of speaking engagements, sat on committees, etc. [...] and, indeed, Oasis continues to be highly supportive of the EA.

Chalke then raised the issue of whether the nature of the EA, it being a subscription organisation, meant there were also financial motivations which influenced the nature of the EA's response to the growing controversy. Chalke explained:



I think that, for the Evangelical Alliance, it was a very difficult situation – they were caught between the devil and the deep blue sea – to use a slightly inappropriate expression. The EA is a subscription organisation. So, if someone says, ‘Unless you discipline Chalke, I’m leaving, I’m withdrawing my block vote,’ you’re in trouble [...]. But, at the same time, this is also why the EA could not throw me out. Because somebody would have come along and said, ‘Well if you’re chucking Chalke out, I’m leaving too.’

There is also the issue of the extent to which the EA’s motivations seem to reveal a more bureaucratic agenda (whether it aimed at keeping the Alliance together or to ensure ongoing subscription funding) rather than actually engaging with the issues at hand and in the dispute. While not directly implying there were financial motivations behind the EA’s response, Stuart Murray Williams noted that the EA leadership

very clearly didn’t want to exclude him [Steve Chalke], partly because of personal relationships and partly because he’s a very high-profile evangelical leader [...]. So I think that then left the Evangelical Alliance with a bit of a quandary; well what do we do? [...] Eventually [the EA] came up with what can only be described as a compromise statement which effectively, as I understood it anyway, said although penal substitution isn’t mentioned in the official Basis of Faith it was assumed by those who framed it [...]. So that left the door open for Steve to say, ‘Well, you know, I can sign the Basis of Faith in good conscience because it doesn’t actually say penal substitution [...]’ But it says very firmly to the more conservative group, ‘This is where we hold the line.’ Now you can either see that as a brilliant piece of compromise, using compromise in a positive sense, or simply as a failure to really engage with the issues.

## **5.2 Strategies**

### **5.2.1 Restriction and Control**

One important strategy which manifested itself in different ways in the accounts of the interviewees concerned the use of various forms of ‘restriction and control’. In terms

of the recent controversy and the subject matter of this thesis, consideration of this and related strategies is particularly significant because it provides an insight into the shaping and management of markers that are used to establish group religious identity and the content of collective orthodoxy. During the course of attempting to explain why he believes penal substitution has been so important for conservative British evangelicals in the construction of their identity during the twentieth century, Tom Wright reflected upon the restrictions and control exerted over the education and formation of many conservative evangelical students. This was particularly so with respect to restricting theological priorities to ‘fundamentals’ such as penal substitution

the result of that was that generations, and it really was a hundred years’ worth or seventy years’ worth of young evangelical students were given books to read and talks to listen to about the danger of going soft and the great people who stood out against the liberals in the old days. And how this was what we had to do [...]. And it was kind of assumed that the penal substitution model, whether it’s the bridge example<sup>196</sup> or whatever, really was ‘the Gospel’ and that really to talk about the Gospel was to talk about penal substitution and vice versa.

Wright recounted his own experience of many conservative free church and Anglican evangelical churches where ministers restrict and control the content of what is perceived as being ‘the essential Gospel’ to a ‘relentless bringing of every single thing back to penal substitution.’<sup>197</sup> He also noted how some more conservative

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<sup>196</sup> The bridge example is an evangelistic presentation device which provides a simple diagrammatic representation of a penal substitution theology. Two opposing sides of a cavernous gap are used to represent the alienation between God and humanity created by human sin and rebellion. A cross is then drawn between the two opposing sides symbolising how Jesus’ death, as a penal substitute for sinful humanity, can be understood as providing ‘the bridge’ and means to overcome this alienation between God and humanity. The journey of people travelling over the bridge is often then labelled ‘repentance’ and it is this point that people are challenged about whether they have indeed repented and where they would hope to locate themselves on the diagram: see for example - InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA (2010).

<sup>197</sup> Wright offered the following example of his own experience of the control and restriction of the Gospel content: ‘I once went to a church where I suffered through a ministry where the Rector really did think that it was his God-given responsibility to preach the Gospel in every sermon. By which he meant substitutionary atonement in every sermon. And he didn’t have too many ways of doing it. It all came back to the same thing. And some people in the congregation said, “Oh it’s so wonderful, we have the

pro-penal substitution evangelicals have restricted the types of speakers who were chosen to speak at significant evangelical conferences to ensure that their theological position is reflected:

In 2003 there was the NEAC [National Evangelical Anglican Congress] Conference<sup>198</sup> in Blackpool, which was disastrous. NEAC had [previously] been actually mature and wise and taking evangelicalism into the real church and into the real world. And in 2003, it just put the clock back completely. [...] [M]ost of us evangelical leaders were not invited or were invited at the last minute to speak to a fringe meeting or something like that [...]. [But] the platform speakers were people from a very safe, hard-right 'Oak-Hilly' type context. And stylistically, culturally, it was just embarrassing, the way they did it.

However this strategy of restriction and control also extended to more practical matters as well, such as the format of events and funding. For example, in his interview, Stuart Murray Williams voiced his frustration at the control and restriction exerted over the format of the workshops at the Atonement Symposium convened by the EA and London School of Theology (hereafter LST) in July 2005. He reflected on how he came to the conclusion that this strategy not only prevented a genuine exchange of ideas but also how he believed it increased the frustration levels of attendees. This frustration manifested itself in some acrimonious questions and comments being directed at him during the event.<sup>199</sup>

In his interview, Jonathan Fletcher also noted that one of the key motivating factors for the establishment of the Reform organisation in 1993 was the desire to

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Gospel preached all the time.” And it was just amazingly narrow and shrunken. And I think he would glory in that if he heard me say that. He would say, “Yes and it’s the narrow gate that leads to life.” And so on.’

<sup>198</sup> There have been four National Evangelical Anglican Congress (NEAC) conferences which have been held in: Keele 1967, Nottingham 1977, Caister 1988 and Blackpool 2003 (Steer 1998: 480).

<sup>199</sup> Murray Williams recounted how prior to the Atonement Symposium, ‘David Hilborn invited me to participate. My question to him was: “Is it going to be a genuine symposium? Is it going to be an opportunity for people to exchange views in a context where there’s lots of opportunity for debate and dialogue?” And David said, “Oh yes, that’s the plan.” It simply wasn’t. It was paper after paper after paper with the opportunity for a few questions to the speaker but in a very controlled environment. There was no real exchange of views with the exception of these workshops and seminars.’

control and restrict the allocation of financial resources. Fletcher recalled that the founders of Reform were concerned to restrict where the diocesan contribution funding of evangelical parishes and other organisations was being allocated ‘because they didn’t want to go on paying dioceses and people who weren’t teaching truth.’<sup>200</sup>

### **5.2.2 The Use and Intentional Manipulation of Media**

A second related strategy that can be identified in the recent controversy concerned the use and intentional manipulation of media. For the purposes of this section, ‘media’ is understood in a broad sense to include the various means of communication which reach out and influence people on a wide scale including: television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, and internet-based platforms, such as websites and blogs.

When reflecting upon the recent controversy, and the motivations of Steve Chalke in particular, David Bebbington drew a crucial link between Chalke’s motivation for a culturally relevant proclamation of the Gospel and the contemporary importance of media and media presentation. Bebbington noted Chalke’s (2008) previously stated insistence that ‘good Christian theology must be deeply and comprehensively informed by the Bible whilst at the same time be creatively alert and related to its specific cultural context’ (41). Bebbington believes that Chalke has

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<sup>200</sup> In Anglican dioceses, one of the common ways in which the central diocesan administration funds its operations is through a levy imposed upon individual parishes and other organisations. This is commonly referred to as a parish’s ‘diocesan assessment’ (or words to that effect). The complaint which Jonathan Fletcher is referring to here arises, for example, in a situation where a conservative evangelical parish is part of a non-evangelical diocese and resents having to contribute to the funding of diocesan operations which do not accord with that parish’s theological ethos. At the time the Reform organisation was established in 1993, this commonly occurred in a situation where a conservative evangelical parish which opposed the ordination of women to the ministry (as presbyter or possibly even as deacon) resented funding their diocesan administration which was ordaining and training women for ordained ministry. Thus strategies were often explored to restrict or at least control the use of their diocesan assessments by the diocesan administration.

displayed a keen awareness that communication, whether it is direct or through the media, is a two-way process dependent upon not only the abilities of the speaker in speaking, but also the willingness and ability of the hearer to hear what is conveyed.<sup>201</sup> Importantly, this view prioritises the importance of cultural relevance in the adaptation of the message to its target. Thus Bebbington reflected that with respect to Chalke:

The whole of his admirable and extensive social work, his public work [...] is designed as a prolonged exercise in Christian apologetic. Not only that, it's actually to help people, no qualms about that, but it is an apologetic exercise in action. He's showing that Christian faith is culturally relevant.

Bebbington maintains that the importance of cultural relevance and perception for Chalke in the context of the recent controversy is revealed first in the very terminology found at the heart of the debate

if you come along and say we are concerned to pick nits about theological formulations in terminology that people in our day do not understand, you are immediately squandering potential cultural relevance. So in his [Chalke's] book, simply to defend penal substitution, that phrase, to avow that phrase, is an exercise in cultural irrelevance [...].

Bebbington then linked this idea of the importance of cultural relevance and perception to the importance of media and media image. A number of interviewees, including Chalke himself, noted his media presence and the place of the media in the

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<sup>201</sup> Utilising the work of Pierre Babin, Michael Glodo (2001) similarly has identified what he believes is the 'evangelical dilemma in speaking the truth of Scripture to the image-driven postmodernist and its deep distrust of logocentrism' (116). Glodo notes the utility which he believes there is in the distinction which Babin draws between, for example, two competing language schemas: the 'scheme of alphabet' and the 'scheme of modulation' (115). Pursuant to the scheme of alphabet 'speaking is more important than listening and words are the dominant form of communication. Systematization of ideas and response through words predominate' (115). By contrast, pursuant to the scheme of modulation: 'The listener is surrounded by multisensory communication. This scheme is more affective and experience-oriented. Sense of belonging and security takes priority over truth. Interaction is more important than passive listening' (119).

conduct of his ministry.<sup>202</sup> When discussing the time he first heard the infamous ‘cosmic child abuse’ phrase used, Chalke remarked:

I was working as a TV presenter at the time – they used to call me ‘the TV vicar’. People would recognise me wherever I went. And, they often wanted to talk about faith, the Bible, the church, etc. So, I’d find myself sitting, chatting to all sorts of people about their questions.

Later in the interview, Chalke expressly linked the term ‘apologist’ to his conception of his evangelical ministry through the media:

I, of course, was always known, as I still am, as not only an evangelical but an evangelical apologist if you like. I’m an evangelist; I’m regularly on the radio, on the TV, in the newspapers, speaking at secular conferences about my faith [...]. So slowly I developed ways of talking about Christian faith that connected with the kind of people I was meeting. I was therefore shocked – though I’m sure naïvely so – when, having put much of this thinking into print [in *The Lost Message of Jesus*], a whole section of Christians got so upset.

Critics of Chalke, such as Mike Ovey, also noted that Chalke’s media presence during the controversy was a factor which contributed to the critics’ decision to publically enter the debate. Ovey was specifically concerned when he heard Chalke promoting the *Christus victor* model of the atonement on BBC Sunday morning programmes. Bebbington therefore concluded that Chalke has demonstrated in his ministry and in his involvement in the recent controversy that he is

extraordinarily aware of the importance of media image and we do live in a society where media are extraordinarily powerful. ‘The medium is the message’, McLuhan<sup>203</sup> has said in the sixties. Well, we’re half a century on from that. The medium is *a fortiori*, the message.

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<sup>202</sup> Concerning Steve Chalke’s media profile, he has been a presenter of the *Songs of Praise* programme on BBC television and has also presented regular segments on ITV including ‘Scruples’ on the GMTV programme and ‘Chalke Talk’ on *The Sunday Morning Programme*. He has also appeared on BBC Radio 4 as the presenter of the *Changing Places* programme.

<sup>203</sup> For an example of this see Marshall McLuhan (1964).

And the medium that is being used by the defenders of penal substitution is verbiage of an assertive declamatory kind that leads to an image, and again I quote Steve Chalke, ‘Of being judgemental, guilt inducing, censorious, finger-wagging, bigoted, self-righteous.’ That is the image that his whole career he’s built on, trying to escape from, trying to eliminate. That is not what evangelicalism is about; although that is indeed a popular perception, ‘wowsersism’ in a word – an Australian word.

But, he sees being judgemental in theological debate as being a typical, indeed, archetypal embodiment of that stance. Therefore it must be totally repudiated. And it seems to me that that is a very major part of his stance [...].

This conclusion regarding Chalke’s extensive experience in using the media in his ministry, led Bebbington to puzzle over why Chalke would have allowed the infamous ‘cosmic child abuse’ to be included in his book in the first place. As with other participants and commentators on the debate who have been discussed previously, Bebbington similarly noted that the actual phrase used by Chalke and Mann in *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003) was widely misperceived – ‘the cross *isn’t* a form of cosmic child abuse’ (182) (emphasis added) – being mistakenly represented as ‘the cross *is* a form of cosmic child abuse.’ The result being that in the context of the course of the recent controversy

people got the wrong message because they didn’t actually analyse the text sufficiently carefully. But people don’t in a society where the medium is the message. They just listen to sound bites. And in my humble estimation, Steve Chalke, with his ‘degree’ in media savviness, should have realised that that was so and shouldn’t have said such a tendentious thing. However, alas and alack he didn’t.

The whole situation is to Bebbington’s mind compounded and intensified by the fact that any reference to child abuse in the contemporary context in Britain will inevitably associate such comments with this salient crime which has received media coverage ‘in a way that it wasn’t in the past. Most obviously the appalling press given

[non-exclusively] to the Roman Catholic Church over the past decade roughly, through the time that this debate has been smouldering.’

One of the most blatant and obvious examples of the manipulation of media which arose during the controversy concerned the banning of the book *The Lost Message of Jesus* by the organisers of the 2004 Keswick Convention. At one level, the banning can be interpreted as Keswick’s attempt to publicly demonstrate their disagreement with what they perceived as Chalke and Mann’s criticism of penal substitution. As Derek Tidball alluded to in his interview however, factors including the media profile, populist style and the stature of Chalke within British evangelicalism were also contributing factors to Keswick’s concerns. Tidball indicated that he confronted the Chair of Keswick Ministries, Peter Maiden,<sup>204</sup> about the banning of the book. During this conversation, Tidball recounted that Maiden also suggested that the organisers of the conference needed to censor the media provided to those attending the conference to ensure doctrinal correctness due to the lack of theological sophistication on the part of some of the attendees. Maiden suggested that while evangelicals with the theological training and experience of Tidball’s could appreciate that Chalke’s comments on Jesus’ death and ‘cosmic child abuse’ should not be interpreted literally, Maiden replied to Tidball: ‘you know that, but many in the evangelical church don’t so they take it as it stands and as gospel truth.’

Another significant example of the use of media to forward a particular position during the controversy concerned the reporting by the progressive and social justice oriented organisation, Ekklesia. Jonathan Bartley, who is the co-director of Ekklesia, also explained in his interview that Ekklesia conceived of itself as not only reporting

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<sup>204</sup> Peter Maiden was the Chairman of Keswick Ministries from 2000 to 2009.



on events during, but also influencing the course and content of debate. He explained that at that time, Ekklesia had

a huge web presence. You know we [Ekklesia] get 6,000 visitors to the site a day. We have a daily bulletin that goes to 10,000 [people]. A lot of those people are church leaders, people within the church, parachurch groups. And we wrote a lot about what was going on with Steve Chalke at the time. [...] We weren't just people observing and standing back at a safe distance, you know, like academics observing a social experiment. We were actually part of it. And it must be to a greater or lesser extent that we actually influenced and contributed to the fact that these things were being discussed and the intensity with which they were being discussed.<sup>205</sup>

What this account also attests to is that, when considering manipulation of media during the recent controversy, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the 'control and manipulation' was only in one direction. Publishers, editors and journalists of the media (religious and secular) were revealed to have a stake in the mediation of the content they were presenting through their material. Tom Wright, for example, lamented about how he has come to the conclusion that the secular media will at certain times seize upon perceived religious scandal and even promote more sensationalised and caricatured religious positions for the sake of the story. He recounted that one of the motivations for writing his essay 'The Cross and the Caricatures' (Wright 2007) was the fact that Jeffrey John's (2007) Lent Talk had been aired on BBC Radio during Holy Week. Wright noted that:

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<sup>205</sup> In this regard, Derek Tidball commented in his interview that there was the definite sense that he and at least some other members of the EA leadership were conscious of Ekklesia's agenda and conduct with respect to its media reporting during the recent controversy. Tidball remarked: 'It's interesting you mention Ekklesia because clearly Jonathan [Bartley] has an ability to create great publicity and is coming of course again from the more radical reformation viewpoint. I'm never entirely sure who he represents or how significant – I mean, very significant – he gets the air time and that's significant, the publicity is good, but I'm not entirely sure. [Question – *The Evangelical Alliance was talking about Ekklesia stirring this [the debate] up?*] There was certainly a sense of that, yes. It was not a major point of discussion but there would have been references to their role in it [...]. Getting people to come [to events concerned with the controversy convened by the EA] and they were amongst those who were saying, "Well we want to leave the EA, if that's what EA stands for," etc.'

Very interestingly when I wrote my review – and do you remember what the other half of the review was [apart from responding to *Pierced for our Transgressions* (2007a)]? The other half of the review was kicking Jeffrey John where it hurts. Because he [John] had produced the same Giles Fraser<sup>206</sup> argument on live radio in Holy Week saying that this is a silly unnecessary ‘duh de la dum’ point of view. And it’s all rather barbaric and awful and we don’t agree with it. [...] [In the end] his caricature was even more caricatured than *Pierced for our Transgressions* was [...]. He threw out the whole biblical baby with that dirty bath water.

That’s the problem. And I suspect that theology has always been like this. You know that preachers desperate to explain *homoousion*<sup>207</sup> in the fourth century probably used some silly illustrations that some Arians would say, ‘Well these stupid Orthodox they’re saying this and that and the other.’ And so it’s probably always gone on like that. But unfortunately these are the things that hit the headlines and make the noise.

The influence of media publishers in the terms of the recent controversy regarding penal substitution extended to influencing the very title of the book which ignited the controversy. Alan Mann explained that initially, as a reflection of his and Chalke’s motivation to emphasise the life and teaching of Jesus, as opposed to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, their desire had been for the title of the book to be *Before the Long Weekend* (i.e. before Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday). During the course of writing the book, Chalke and Mann’s thinking on this issue developed and they then decided upon the title *The Message of Jesus*. However in the end, according to Mann, Zondervan, the book’s publisher

came up with the idea of calling it *The Lost Message of Jesus* [...]. But if you’ve got ‘The *Lost* Message of Jesus’ then that becomes a little bit more ‘What’s missing?’ You know. And so it was a kind of – I guess it was a publishing tactic more than anything. A marketing idea.

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<sup>206</sup> The Revd Dr Giles Fraser is currently the Canon Chancellor of St Paul’s Cathedral, London. He has written a number of popular-level media articles in which he is critical of penal substitution. For example, Fraser (2010) questioned whether ‘penal substitution has very much to say to those living close by the stench of death in Haiti. To speak of Christ “paying the price of human sin” is not a convincing way to address the redemption of human misery and death that the streets of Port-au-Prince are crying out for’ (para 6). For further examples of his view on penal substitution see Fraser 2007a and 2007b.

<sup>207</sup> A Trinitarian term meaning ‘of the same substance’ (LaCugna 1991: 36).

The suggestion being made here is that by emphasising the notion of ‘lost’, there is an implication that there is a more authentic message of Jesus which has been inadvertently and/or deliberately mislaid. Potentially this could even extend to the implication that the existing ‘message’ is illegitimate compared to the authentic message which has been ‘lost’. This was precisely the interpretation made by some of the advocates of penal substitution during the controversy (for example, Stephen Witmer’s (2005) review)<sup>208</sup> concerning what they believed Chalke and Mann were saying in their book; penal substitution is illegitimate; it is not the authentic view of the significance of Jesus’ death on the cross; penal substitution is as bad and heinous as a form of child abuse. This interpretation and reaction contributed to the passion in the debate and it would also appear reasonable to conclude that the title selected by the publishers of the book potentially played a part in erecting an interpretive framework which contributed to this controversy developing.

### **5.2.3 Denial of Orthodoxy**

A third strategy which can be identified as having been widely employed during the recent controversy is the denial of orthodoxy. This strategy manifested itself in the actual or perceived fear among many conservative evangelical leaders of the denial of their ‘conservative evangelical’ orthodoxy and therefore their overall legitimacy as evangelical leaders. This situation could result from the impression being reached by others within the conservative evangelical group within British evangelicalism, that an individual had strayed from orthodoxy by not wholeheartedly supporting a pro-penal-

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<sup>208</sup> In his review in which he is highly critical of *The Lost Message of Jesus*, Witmer (2005) notes that: ‘On the cover of my copy of the book there is a picture of a corked glass bottle containing a scrap of paper. The implication seems to be that Jesus’ teaching which was lost for many years, has now been discovered and is revealed within the book. [...] The authors wish to reclaim this message for the world, which has largely ignored it, and for the church, which has largely obscured and misunderstood it’ (60).

substitutionary position. Tom Wright noted that among many British evangelicals during the twentieth century, the opinion was that ‘anyone who didn’t talk about penal substitution didn’t really believe in the Gospel and therefore people would not be saved under their ministry, etc., etc. And so this [promotion of penal substitution] was really a gold standard.’ Concerning the recent controversy itself, Stuart Murray Williams admitted that he certainly became aware that denial of orthodoxy was a strategy employed in the advocacy of penal substitution:

It feels like a kind of shibboleth. I mean that’s the kind of language that I would use really. That if you don’t subscribe to this particular understanding of the atonement, it raises questions about your theological orthodoxy or even your claim to be a Christian. It does seem to go that deep. Certainly some of the letters and conversations I had shortly after the debate,<sup>209</sup> were very clearly questioning my salvation, questioning my theological thrux and so on. So I became aware much more sharply than I had been before of just how passionately people felt about the issue. It was evident from the debate, the responses to the debate, just how very angry people were getting that anybody should dare to question this and still sit within an evangelical constituency.

Derek Tidball himself provided an example of this strategy in action when he commented upon the situation of a member of the evangelical movement (such as Chalke) denying that penal substitution has the status of being at least one of the valid New Testament images promoting the significance of Jesus’ death on the Cross. He explained, ‘I’m not happy when people say penal substitution is not biblical, cannot be preached, when they deny it. [...] That seems to me to be moving from being an evangelical to being an ex-evangelical.’ Tom Wright maintained that even though he is aware that many British evangelicals are concerned about the image of God and humanity which results from many popular articulations of penal substitution, this fear of denial of orthodoxy prevented them from speaking out: ‘here’s the irony. They’re so

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<sup>209</sup> The Public Debate on the controversy arising out of the publication of the *Lost Message of Jesus* convened by the EA in October 2004 at which Murray Williams spoke.

frightened that they daren't even say, "You've just made God into a horrible monster," because then they'd be told, "Oh no! You're a naughty liberal.""<sup>210</sup> Wright also reflected on how he has formed the opinion from his engagement with other more conservative British evangelicals that, as a result of his theological views, they regard him as 'a traitor to the evangelical cause.' He maintains that many conservative evangelicals

regard people like me as deeply damaged traitors to the cause, and you know you hear all the rhetoric about liberal evangelicalism, etc. To which I say, 'Excuse me, show me which of the classic evangelical doctrines I don't believe. And what's more, show me where your interpretation of scripture actually trumps mine. Because I'm not giving up one verse of scripture, thank you very much. And if you take me on, you know, I'll be very happy to have the fight!'

Wright identified a *prima facie* example from the recent controversy concerning the use and fear of the denial of legitimacy and orthodoxy with regards to the number of senior conservative evangelical leaders (forty-two people in total, spread over a total of ten pages at the beginning of the book), who felt that it was necessary to ensure that, in the context of the controversy that had developed, their names were recorded as supporting and endorsing Jeffery *et al.*'s book *Pierced For Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (2007a) and its actively pro-penal substitutionary position. Wright reflected:

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<sup>210</sup> Jonathan Bartley also talked about the response he has received from many evangelicals when he has talked to them in the media about how he understands that 'the justice of God' in the Bible is more concerned with 'grace and forgiveness and making things right' as opposed to 'God as someone who is a vengeful, nasty person that has to have a price paid and demand satisfaction or whatever [...].' Bartley recalled that in this situation: 'people are staring at me over the interviewing table or talking to me down the phone saying, "Well that's got nothing to do with Christianity whatsoever. You're just a liberal!"' (Laughter)'.

And then the trouble is, once the flag has been raised, I mean it was extraordinary in the front covers of that book, all the great and the good from the evangelical world were kind of rolled out, rather like all the satraps and prefects and commanders and officers in Daniel, Chapter 3. You know here they all are. We're all telling you this is how it is. [...] [B]ecause they daren't be seen to be not on board. If the flag is being raised, we've got to rally to the standard!

In his interview, Steve Chalke noted how use of the resource of the denial of legitimacy and orthodoxy even extended to the sources he allegedly relied upon in his book. As was discussed in the previous chapter, one of the criticisms of Chalke and Mann's infamous 'cosmic child abuse' reference by advocates of penal substitution was to suggest that Chalke and Mann had sourced the expression from feminist theologians, in particular Rita Nakashima Brock (1989), a suggestion Chalke expressly denies. Chalke however suggested that this allegation was rather oddly used by his critics as a way to bring his evangelical orthodoxy into question: 'One of the funny things I found was that it was thrown at me that I'd been reading feminist theology as though that would have been a terrible thing to do.' Alan Mann also commented upon how he found the attacks on his orthodoxy by pro-penal-substitution academics hurtful because they were personal:

[At] Oak Hill and stuff they [Jeffery *et al.*] published [in] *Pierced for our Transgressions*. [...] It questioned whether my faith was orthodox in the way it was written [...]. I read it and I thought, 'Come on. I am not saying that Jesus isn't the Son of God or something [...].' I guess in a way, it was hurtful because it was more personal than, you know, we never attacked anyone personally. [...] If penal substitution is [a standard] of orthodoxy [...] and has the status of believing that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus is resurrected from the dead, that we believe in the Trinity, it's raising the bar of penal substitution which they don't have justification for in my view, in order to then pull you down a peg because you haven't publicly said that you agree with penal substitution.

#### 5.2.4 Exclusion

Another related strategy employed during the recent controversy was exclusion. As will be demonstrated, the use of this strategy, or at least the perception by some people of the desire on the part of others to use this strategy, can be identified at every major phase of the recent controversy. Exclusion strategies also took on a variety of forms including: exclusion from having an active involvement in the debate; attempts to have individuals expelled from the EA and effectively branded a heretic; and they even extended to one interviewee forming the opinion that his views were being excluded from the subject matter of the interview conducted with him as research for this thesis.

In particular, in his interview, Alan Mann, the co-author of *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003), explained in considerable detail how he felt that he was excluded from actively participating in the debate which ensued from the publication of the book. This had the result of effectively denying him the opportunity to defend his reputation and promote his own position in the controversy notwithstanding the fact that he was being criticised by advocates of penal substitution for having co-authored the book. He recounted that while Steve Chalke had engaged his services to co-author the book, in none of Chalke's subsequent publications in the context of the controversy was Mann ever invited to collaborate with him further.

When Mann attempted to have an article defending and clarifying his own position published in a relevant evangelical publication, it was not selected to be published. This is particularly significant because he maintains that Chalke's position on penal substitution post-publication of *The Lost Message of Jesus* does not build upon their shared position articulated jointly in the book and it also does not fully represent Mann's own views on penal substitution. He explained that he was not

officially notified of or invited to participate in the 2004 Atonement Debate convened by the EA. The only post-publication opportunity offered to him for participation in the debate was when he was invited to be a member of the panel at the Questions-and-Answers session at the 2005 Atonement Symposium. The compounding of his not being able to participate in public forums and media, he claims, resulted in his effective exclusion. This clearly affected Mann. As he explained

my name became associated with a debate which had gone on beyond [the position articulated in *The Lost Message of Jesus*] [...]. And until that Q&A session I was given no opportunity to give any kind of public address or public statement if you like on how it impacted me personally [or] my views theologically [...] even though they were using my name everywhere as part of a debate.

It also appears that the content of some of the questions put to Mann during the interview with him for this thesis reinforced and even contributed afresh to this real sense of exclusion on his part:

But I think it is interesting that in a way, in your question, you talk about Steve [Chalke]. In a number of your questions you talked about Steve and I think, in a way, at times it felt like there was an oddity about it because it is expressed as the concern is that these are the views of Steve who is an evangelical whatever, and there isn't any concern that they are the views of Alan Mann. Or mildly associated with his views.

While it was never a deliberate strategy to exclude or create the impression of exclusion on the part of Alan Mann through the content and line of questioning conducted in the interview, it is upon reflection, and in the context of the comments he has made and which have been extracted above, certainly possible to see how he reached this conclusion. Questions which were asked included (but were not limited to) issues such as: seeking Mann's response to the content of the EA's Public Statement in 2004 condemning Steve Chalke; Mann's response to the content and reception of some



of Chalke's subsequent publications – particularly Chalke (2004), (2005) and (2008); whether the high public profile of Chalke as an evangelical leader in Britain may have contributed to the passionate response of advocates of penal substitution during the controversy; and what does the fact that some people were calling for severe sanctions to be imposed upon Chalke reveal about the place of penal substitution in their theology and identity?

Upon further reflection, some of the 'Chalke-focus' of these questions may have been due to the fact that at the time of interviewing Mann, Chalke had not responded to the initial request for an interview and several months had indeed passed since sending the initial request letter. Thus there may have been an unnamed motivation to canvass these issues with Mann (someone who had collaborated with Chalke in the production of the *Lost Message of Jesus* and could provide information regarding issues surrounding the publication and subsequent fallout over the book) because at the time of interviewing him it seemed unlikely that it would be possible to put the questions to Chalke himself. As it transpired, Chalke did eventually make himself available to be interviewed, an outcome that was directly the result of Mann's personal intervention in agreeing to attempt to facilitate contact with Chalke in order to obtain his participation in the research for this thesis.

As was discussed in Chapter 4, with regards to Chalke's own experiences, after the 2004 Public Debate convened by the EA, the strategy adopted by some conservative evangelical advocates of penal substitution against him even took the form of attempting to have him tried for heresy and/or expelled from the EA.<sup>211</sup> As has

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<sup>211</sup> Concerning a modern example of a Protestant heresy trial, in 1992-3 a Presbyterian minister was tried and convicted of heresy by the Presbyterian Church of Australia for inconsistency with the Westminster Confession, specifically with respect to the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture (Harris 1996: 2-3). Concerning the controversy ensuing from the publication of *The Lost Message of Jesus* the conservative

also been previously discussed earlier in this chapter, there is no small amount of irony in this desire. This essentially stems from the fact that Chalke confirmed in his interview that he was not at any relevant time a personal member of the EA. Thus it seems as though Chalke's conservative evangelical critics were eager to employ a strategy of exclusion without confirming that it was a strategy available to them. Such precipitous calls for action also serve to confirm how quickly some conservative evangelicals taking part in the debate were willing to resort to this strategy of exclusion.

In November 2004 the EA issued its public statement which in part sternly condemned Chalke for the substance and style of his previous criticisms of penal substitution. When it was put to Derek Tidball, who had been a member of the EA Council at the relevant time, that the content of the public statement contained quite strong language and sentiments he responded:

Not strong enough for many evangelicals. You have to understand the Alliance is in a no-win situation. It is an alliance of evangelicals; that constellation that I've talked about. But its members, though theoretically, at least, are committed to unity and love and respect of differences, mostly [they] are coming from one particular stance on issues. So for some, we should just have had a heresy trial and thrown Steve out.

David Hilborn noted that while some wished to expel Chalke, which would have been an exceptional move, the EA leadership were determined that he remain within the

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North American evangelical writer John Piper (2007), for example, suggested that Chalke and Mann's 'cosmic child abuse' criticism constituted blasphemy: 'One of most infamous and tragic paragraphs written by a church leader in the last several years heaps scorn on one of the most precious truths of the atonement: Christ's bearing our guilt and God's wrath. [...] With one cynical stroke of the pen, the triumph of God's love over God's wrath in the death of his beloved Son is blasphemed, while other church leaders write glowing blurbs on the flaps of his book. But God is not mocked' (76). The comment concerning 'other church leaders write glowing blurbs on the flaps of his book' is presumably a reference to Tom Wright and his recommendation of *The Lost Message of Jesus* which appears on the cover of the first edition of the book.

Alliance so as to persuade him, regarding the impact of his criticisms, from within.

Steve Chalke commented that

the only reason I wasn't put on a heresy trial and burnt or whatever was because in our modern world people don't have the power to do that kind of thing anymore. But, the attitude of many remained the same. I am convinced that if they could have dealt with me more harshly, they would have done so. But, as the law denied them the right to stone me, instead they tried to damn me with words. And the things that some people wrote or said about me; the way they ostracised me, ignored me, it was extraordinary and enlightening [...].<sup>212</sup>

However, as Tidball indicates above, some of the more conservative evangelical advocates of penal substitution remained dissatisfied even with the level of condemnation of Chalke in the public statement issued by the EA in November 2004. The strategy they then adopted was to exclude themselves and their followers from having any active ministry involvement with Chalke or organisations that were perceived to be associated with him (such as Oasis and Spring Harvest). As was discussed in earlier chapters, in 2007 the leadership of Keswick Ministries and the University and Colleges Christian Fellowship (hereafter UCCF) indicated that they were following this path by ending their 14-year association with Spring Harvest<sup>213</sup> in jointly hosting the Spring Harvest Word Alive conferences. In its place, Keswick and UCCF established the rival New Word Alive conferences. These commenced in 2008. In his interview, David Hilborn explained that the leadership of New Word Alive have excluded him from participating in their conference. During the same period, however, he has been invited to participate in Spring Harvest. Hilborn reflected upon the ironies of this situation, he being an advocate of penal substitution and is thus, on the

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<sup>212</sup> A similar observation was made by Stuart Murray Williams during his interview about the response he also received from advocates of penal substitution after he spoke in support of Chalke at the 2004 Atonement debate.

<sup>213</sup> At this time Chalke was a member of the Spring Harvest council.

presenting issue, more doctrinally aligned to the New Word Alive position than he is to Chalke's. Hilborn believes that it is quite possible that his ongoing exclusion from New Word Alive is due to the fact that its leadership perceive him as 'being a bit flaky because I was in the [Evangelical] Alliance and we didn't come out completely and denounce Steve Chalke as a heretic [...].'

In a manner which foreshadows one of the conclusions that will be reached at the end of this chapter, Hilborn discussed what he perceives as the current impasse in British evangelicalism created by the recent controversy and the ongoing state of mutual exclusion between more conservative ('Oveyite') and more open social justice oriented ('Chalkean') evangelicals. Looking forward, he also identified possible ongoing and further consequences which he believes might flow from this situation

the current impasse between the 'Chalkeans' and the 'Oveyites' [...] [is that] they've fought each other to a standstill. And I'm really worried actually about the fact that the Lausanne-supporting evangelicals who have made those strides on social responsibility will once again, you know, diverge from the keepers of the Calvinist or the Reformation flame who are really vital to evangelicalism for its doctrinal integrity. And that would be a tragedy because people like [John] Stott and others have worked so hard to bring reconciliation between those previously quite divergent streams and this has the potential, this whole rumbling debate about the Cross, to put the barriers up again between the social-action evangelicals and the doctrinaire evangelicals.

#### **5.2.5 The Assertion of Superior Scholarship**

The final strategy to be considered here, and one which can be seen as being employed during the controversy, was definitely also its most colourful. It concerned the assertion that was made by some interviewees that their scholarship was superior to that of their rivals. As might be expected, this claim did not go unnoticed and does not

go unchallenged. For instance, in his interview, Tom Wright repeatedly asserted his academic credentials over those of some of his opponents and critics. For example, Wright criticised conservative evangelicals, such as Peter Jensen,<sup>214</sup> who continue to rely upon reformation exegesis that (in Wright's opinion) misinterprets the Pauline writings. He remarked

but it's very ironic that at the end of the twentieth century, after all the research has been done, and after all the wonderful evangelical scholarship of the previous generation, people like Howard Marshall and so on. And all the work of people like Tony Thiselton [...]. And it might as well never have happened. Ultimately it's like a child who being offered the chance to go and play some very interesting game of cricket or whatever, prefers just to go back on the beach and make mud pies.

When explaining his understanding of penal substitution as opposed to what he regards as the erroneous understanding of some conservative evangelicals such as Jeffery *et al.* (2007), Wright observed:

I think there is such a thing, which is called penal substitution, to which I will give whole-hearted affirmation. But I will put it in a different context which will try and ensure that it doesn't mean some of the silly things that people say it means. You know it isn't butcher's shop theology.

Finally, when commenting upon some of the responses that people had made to his essay (Wright 2007) and specifically his criticism therein of Jeffery *et al.* (2007a), Wright remarked:

I saw on a website, I don't normally read what's on websites, but somebody sent me this link, somebody saying N.T. Wright seems to be saying very rude things about his fellow evangelicals. And why he's having a go at that book I don't know. Because he believes in PSA [penal substitutionary atonement] doesn't he? I thought 'Oh, you just don't get it.' And the trouble is it's a postmodern non-debate, even among good evangelicals. It's just a sloganeers

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<sup>214</sup> Peter Jensen is currently the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Australia. In his interview, Tom Wright observed that, 'Peter and I go back a long way. We were doing graduate studies at Oxford at the same time. In fact, I sold him my set of the *Parker Society*.'

debate. Yes, 'PSA': are you for it or against it? You know sorry, we cannot do theology, we can't do 'biblical' theology like that. You can do polemic, knock about stuff, but it's very low grade.

When David Hilborn was explaining one of the reasons why the EA had resisted calls for Steve Chalke's expulsion from the organisation, he also suggested that:

The other reason we did that [...] is because Steve's not an academic theologian. And it was obvious to those of us who had some pretensions to that or were, you know, in academia, that he did not have the nuance. He didn't have the sophistication of those [for example, Mark Baker and Joel Green] who had questioned penal substitution from within [evangelicalism]. [...] Steve struggles when it gets beyond a certain level of historical knowledge or of engagement with the primary sources. And it's unfair to expect him to be able to argue with a Mike Ovey or with a Gary Williams because that is not what he does. They [Ovey and Williams] devote their whole life to this issue.

Concerning some of the responses to the strategy of asserting superior academic credentials, one interviewee recounted a story about how they became aware that an academic involved in the controversy was completely oblivious to the fact that the position he was advocating had contributed to the significant levels of emotional guilt being experienced by one of his closest colleagues on his staff. The implication here being that academic accomplishment does not ensure an awareness of the needs and concerns of ordinary evangelicals, and indeed, may in fact contribute to such lack of awareness.

Steve Chalke also drew a distinction between the perspectives of people working in the academy and those ministering at street level with the implication that the latter was of most importance. He also implied that the strategy Wright was

pursuing in the debate emerges from a desire to ‘have his cake and eat it’.<sup>215</sup> When commenting upon Tom Wright’s (2007) essay in which he set out his understanding of the nature of penal substitution, Chalke observed:

Tom Wright eventually wrote as he did and said that he agreed with the things that I’d said and reaffirmed the position he had taken when he first endorsed my book. Our only difference is that Tom, having redefined it, wants to hold onto the term penal substitution [...]. He thinks that this is important, even though, for him, it means something entirely different to the way that it is commonly used [...]. Effectively his view is, ‘I agree with Steve but I also believe that the term penal substitution has a role to play if we can rescue and rehabilitate and define it.’

Chalke then suggested that in contrast with evangelicals such as Wright:

I’m an activist; a pragmatist. I don’t work in an academic setting, but down at the coalface. My point is simply that, as there are so many people using the term ‘penal substitutionary atonement’ to mean exactly what Tom is saying it does not mean, then, to my mind, we’re much better off abandoning it altogether and starting again with a clean sheet of paper.<sup>216</sup>

A final example of responding to this strategy is left to Jonathan Fletcher. In the interview, when discussing Tom Wright’s criticism of Jeffery *et al.*’s book *Pierced for*

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<sup>215</sup> As was explained in Chapter 4, this is due to the fact that while Wright has said that he agrees with Chalke and other critics that penal substitution in the form advocated by, for example, Mike Ovey, is flawed, unbiblical and destructive to the proclamation of the Gospel, he nonetheless wants to hold onto affirming the validity of the term ‘penal substitution’ by defining it in a particularly nuanced way compared to the way in which every other advocate and/or critic of penal substitution involved in the controversy has defined it and intends or intended it to be understood. The motivation for this strategy is presumably to avoid the criticism being levelled against him by advocates of penal substitution that he cannot validly be considered an evangelical anymore because he (like Chalke) has openly rejected penal substitution. Yet at the same time, Wright also wishes to align himself with Chalke in criticising the position of conservative evangelicals who advocate penal substitution, as they understand it, because they (conservative evangelicals) have often been highly critical of Wright’s position on a number of theological issues (for example, many of his interpretations of Paul’s writings).

<sup>216</sup> A similar observation on Wright’s understanding of penal substitution was made by Derek Tidball who suggested that the ‘finely nuanced theological statements are not understood by the vast majority of people. And Tom is considered actually hilarious; a highly respected theologian, but a confusing character at other levels. There was an emerging church conference not so far from here a few years ago which he spoke at, and he was considered the great guru because his ideas about ecclesiology were very radical and [his] theology was one that they could identify with immensely. And then in his third talk, he totally justified Establishment and being Bishop of Durham! I was not present, but several of my friends were, and just could not tie-up what was going on. “If he said ‘that’ then surely ...” (Laughter).’

*Our Transgressions* (2007a), and indeed the practice of academia generally, Fletcher concluded:

Now Tom has to say this because he thinks he knows better than Martin Luther and so on. And this is the problem of all of you in the academy; that you always have to say something new [...]. I don't know where Tom is getting this from because, I mean, he says the Gospel is not about being saved.

## **Chapter Conclusion – Observations on the Controversy**

### **The Doctrine of the Atonement and its Continuing Importance for British Evangelical Identity**

As has been discussed, the concept of 'identity' refers to the answers individuals and groups provide to the questions, 'Who am I?' and 'Who are we?' (Olson 1993: 33).

Answers to these fundamental questions can be provided in the form of a series of identity markers which compose and define the identity of an individual or group. A first observation therefore arising from the controversy of the mid-2000s is that the doctrine of the atonement continues to function as an important doctrinal marker used by British evangelicals in the construction of their collective religious identity.

Notwithstanding the conceptual zeal displayed by protagonists in their discussions of the various atonement models (particularly with respect to their advocacy or criticism of penal substitution), none of the protagonists suggested that crucicentrism and the doctrine of the atonement should cease to play the central role these elements have played in the construction of religious identity throughout the history of British evangelicalism. The orthodoxy assertion and the primary controlling status assertion, the arguments which were subsequently raised in rebuttal of penal substitution being a



core or fundamental tenet of evangelical belief, and even Tom Wright's distinctive atonement theology and conception of penal substitution, all affirm the importance of the doctrine of the atonement in defining British evangelical identity. Although some critics of penal substitution have sought to emphasise what they regard as the model's neglect of the importance of other aspects of Jesus' life and ministry, in particular his Resurrection, these same critics were not attempting to displace the importance of Jesus' death on the Cross 'for us, and for our salvation'. Thus in light of the observations made in Chapter 3 concerning the manner in which crucicentrism and the doctrine of the atonement have been used as important markers in the construction of British evangelical identity since the first half of the eighteenth century, the research and analysis presented in this thesis verify that both continue to fulfil this central function into the twenty-first century.

### **The Intra-Evangelical Function of Penal Substitution and its Importance for Conservative Evangelical Identity**

A number of factors which can be identified from the preceding analysis also support the conclusion that penal substitution continues as a central tenet of conservative British evangelical identity. The contestation by the protagonists during the course of the controversy has had the effect of highlighting the presence of an identity marker which remains central to the self-understanding of this section of British evangelicalism. The various reactions exhibited during the course of the controversy have also shown this to be extremely powerful. Conservative evangelicals seem to have prioritised subscription to penal substitution as one of the core aspects of religion

used in the construction and marking of their collective religious identity. As a key identity marker, it functions as one of the distinctive characteristics or features which compose and reflect conservative evangelical identity. Indeed, through events such as those which unfolded during the controversy, the narrative associated with this identity marker has become more clearly codified and the materials generated during this time (such as the various public statements, monographs and proceedings of symposia) will in all likelihood become available as a resource for future contestation.

Penal substitution can also be regarded as providing an ‘intra-evangelical’ function as one of the markers used to delineate boundaries between different types of British evangelicals. The material presented in Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrates that none of the protagonists who had embraced the ‘evangelical’ label for themselves before they became engaged in the controversy wished to relinquish it. Advocacy and criticism of penal substitution has thus had the result of splitting evangelicals into separate intra-evangelical groups or factions.

In addition to the fact that the very content of the theological concepts which were contested related to advocacy and criticism of matters specifically concerning penal substitution, the overview of the controversy presented in Section 4.1 attests to the level of energy and commitment which sections of the British evangelical elite have demonstrated as they engaged with this issue. This observation is further reinforced when consideration is given to the volume of contestation that was manifested in the number of high-profile events which took place, the publications produced and the status of the individuals and organisations who chose to become involved in the controversy. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that such a level of time spent and energy invested would not have been expended if the issue in dispute,

namely penal substitution, was not located squarely at a major fault line which separates from and distinguishes between powerful groups within contemporary British evangelicalism.

The conflicting motivations displayed by the protagonist groups during the course of the controversy were considered in Section 5.1. These provide further evidence for the way in which penal substitution performs an intra-evangelical delineation function within British evangelicalism. Critics of penal substitution were motivated by factors, including the promotion of social justice, which go beyond what they would regard as the narrow and individualistic focus of the gospel proclaimed by those British evangelicals who subscribe to a penal substitutionary understanding of the atonement. In response to such criticism, advocates of penal substitution were motivated by the strong desire to defend this model of the atonement against the attacks they perceived were being levelled at a primary tenet of their collective identity and a core message in the gospel as they perceive it. Subscription to penal substitution during the course of the controversy seems to have functioned for advocates as a way in which to firmly establish the boundaries and identify who in fact was 'within' or 'beyond' that which they regard as constituting doctrinally 'authentic' British evangelicalism.

It is useful to reflect upon the broad range of strategies the protagonists have brought to bear on the debates during the controversy. These strategies were extremely powerful with regards to the values of this particular religious collective. For example, the fact that advocates of penal substitution were prepared to question another person's orthodoxy and to deny the legitimacy of their theological views is a very serious accusation for evangelical Christians who are highly committed to the authenticity of

their doctrinal correctness. Such strategies were also often deployed in a manner which sought to foster delineation, separation and even exclusion. Advocates of penal substitution tried to weaken and even exclude their rivals in order promote what they regard as a key element of ‘overarching’ evangelical orthodoxy. Such methods were aimed at establishing the dominance of one possible narrative over and against its alternatives. If these attempts had been successful, the narrative promoted by conservative evangelicals would have reached the status of being a dominant discourse (Baumann 1996: 188). All of these factors attest to the ongoing importance for British evangelicals of penal substitution’s intra-evangelical delineation function.

It was previously discussed in the Chapter 3 that during the first half of the twentieth century, certain intra-evangelical groups could be distinguished by factors such as their subscription to penal substitution. These groups were known respectively as ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’ evangelicals. Concerning the evangelical groups which could be distinguished during the controversy in the mid-2000s, in relation to the advocates of penal substitution, scholars such David Bebbington (2009a) have specifically employed the term ‘conservative’ to refer to the British intra-evangelical group that is being referred to in this instance (98ff). Rob Warner (2007) has also referred to conservative evangelicalism as being one of the two forms of English pan-evangelicalism which had risen to notable prominence by the late twentieth century (15). While self-designation is not a conclusive reason in and of itself for accepting or rejecting the validity of a particular label (Harris 2008: 5), in his interview, Mike Ovey used the terms ‘conservative evangelicals’ and ‘classical conservatives’ to refer to himself and other contemporary British evangelical advocates of penal substitution. The latter term draws upon the obvious correlation and sense of continuity between his stance concerning advocacy of penal substitution and the approach of the earlier twentieth century conservative

evangelicals. Finally, and in terms of the post-1960s position with respect to British evangelicalism, the label ‘conservative’ also conveniently functions as an umbrella term for the modern alliance which is now being forged between the more conservative elements from both the reformed and charismatic evangelical traditions. As was explained in Chapters 4 and 5, the New Word Alive conferences, for example, were created out of the controversy during the mid-2000s concerning penal substitution, and are distinguished by the presence of and contributions made by members from the conservative reformed and charismatic evangelical traditions (Warnock 2010).

Concerning the critics of penal substitution, it was previously noted in Chapter 1 that the label ‘liberal evangelical’ has been applied to a specific group of British evangelicals who came to prominence during the first half of the twentieth century (Barclay 1997: 13; Tidball 1994: 99). Except where it is being used in a pejorative sense,<sup>217</sup> the term ‘liberal evangelical’ has now generally gone out of usage in British evangelicalism with respect to describing a specific intra-evangelical group (Tidball 1994: 100; Johnston 2001: 682; Bebbington 2009a: 99). The term ‘open evangelical’ has been used by scholars such as David Bebbington (2009a: 104-5) and it was specifically used by Steve Chalke to describe himself and similarly minded British evangelicals. Some of the qualities associated with open evangelicalism include: a more positive disposition towards learning from other Christian traditions; asserting the critical role of social-justice initiatives in evangelism; support for women’s ministry in the church at all levels; and being world affirming, working with, as opposed to against, the grain of society (Jackman 1998; Broadbent 2007). As was demonstrated in Section 5.1, the promotion of social justice issues as being at the heart of the Christian gospel and giving effect to the spirit of the resolutions made at the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World

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<sup>217</sup> See for example Ovey (2010).

Evangelisation, were also qualities which were primary motivations for Chalke and other critics of penal substitution during the controversy.

Still, while a number of outspoken critics of penal substitution have applied this label to themselves, it should be noted that not all who wish to be labelled as ‘open evangelicals’ are critical of penal substitution, and indeed some fully support it. As was discussed in Chapter 4, Pete Broadbent, Bishop of Willesden, was shown to be a vigorous advocate of penal substitution in his condemnation of Jeffrey John’s 2007 Lent talk (Spring Harvest Press Releases 2007). Yet Broadbent has been referred to as a leading Church of England open evangelical (Kings 2003) and has described himself as a ‘theologically conservative open evangelical’ (Broadbent 2007). Therefore, it is not possible to assume that a self-labelled open evangelical is necessarily a critic of penal substitution. Indeed a fitting label for the critics of penal substitution is difficult to identify. This is due in part to the fact that critics of penal substitution in Britain do not currently amount to a coherent intra-evangelical group. Instead such critics are drawn from a variety of evangelical traditions and are not as homogeneous as their conservative evangelical opponents.

# **General Conclusion**

## **Summary of Findings**

This thesis has provided an overview of the doctrinal controversy which occurred among British evangelicals in the mid-2000s and it has located it within a tradition of contestation concerning the doctrine of the atonement and penal substitution in British evangelicalism. The aim has been to better understand what the historical and more recent contestation of these theological concepts reveals about their use as markers in the construction of British evangelical identity and the identity of particular intra-evangelical groups. There were two primary groups of findings.

The doctrine of the atonement, which is a central theological concept which accompanies crucicentrism (Bebbington 1989: 14), has functioned as a key identity marker used by British evangelicals in the construction of their collective identity throughout their history. Its centrality has served as one of the distinctive characteristics or features of Britain evangelical identity. An examination was conducted of the atonement theologies promoted by significant evangelical figures and organisations during five separate historical periods which could be distinguished between the 1730s-2000s. This examination has revealed that, with only a few exceptions, British evangelicals have embraced a crucicentric, substitutionary atonement theology which affirms the basic proposition that, on the Cross, Jesus died for us and our salvation (Holmes 2008: 283). The prominence afforded to the doctrine of the atonement throughout this time warrants the conclusion that it has functioned as one of the external identity markers historically used by British evangelicals to differentiate themselves from other expressions of Christianity.

It was further demonstrated that historically most British evangelicals have been willing to subscribe to a multi-model anchoring and to employ a variety of different and complementary atonement model anchors (Holmes 2008: 283). This approach is found in the writings of seminal founding figures within British and North American evangelicalism including John Wesley ([1746] 1984; [1742] 1989), George Whitefield (1771-1772b) and Jonathan Edwards ([1741] 2003; [1744] 1989).

It was also established that since the second half of the nineteenth century some British evangelicals have attempted to assert the pre-eminence of a juridical and penal substitutionary anchoring above other models of the atonement in terms of their understanding of their identity as evangelicals (for example, Thomas Crawford (1888), George Smeaton ([1870] 1991), J.I. Packer (1974), and John Stott ([1986] 2006)). As a result of this, penal substitution gained significance in defining the collective identity of one group within British evangelicalism, namely conservative evangelicals. Conversely it was also found that, from the first half of the nineteenth century, a number of British evangelicals have been expressly critical of juridical atonement anchors, such as penal substitution (for example, John McLeod Campbell ([1855-6] 1906), Thomas Erskine (1874), Edward Irving ([1828] 1865), Travers Guy Rogers (1924), R. T. Howard (1924) and Charles E. Raven (1925)).

As a result of this open criticism of penal substitution from some evangelicals (and its fervent defence by others) contestation around this subject has been significant at various times within British evangelicalism. When such contestation intensified towards the end of the nineteenth century and then into the twentieth century, it was found that penal substitution was increasingly taking on an ‘intra-evangelical’ identity-defining function. Advocacy for, or criticism of, the penal substitutionary model of the atonement came to represent one of the boundaries which has come to delineate



between different types of British evangelicals. In particular, during the first half of the twentieth century, this distinction marked a crucial boundary between conservative and liberal evangelicals.

The second group of findings relates more particularly to the analysis of the controversy which occurred among British Evangelicals in the mid-2000s. In addition to data obtained from available documentary sources, new and original data was also compiled via a series of semi-structured interviews with some of the main protagonists involved in the controversy. The interview data was used to supplement, clarify and, on some occasions, correct information regarding aspects of the controversy presented in the documentary sources which had been produced to date. In many ways, this thesis constitutes the first attempt to make sense of the nature and significance of the controversy in the mid-2000s with respect to the function of the doctrine of the atonement and atonement models, such as penal substitution, for contemporary British evangelical identity.

The first conclusion arising from the analysis of the controversy of the mid-2000s is that the doctrine of the atonement continues to work as a key doctrinal marker used by British evangelicals in the construction of their collective religious identity. The content of the main theological arguments which were considered and analysed with respect to penal substitution, in the form of the orthodoxy assertion, the primary controlling assertion, and Tom Wright's distinctive atonement theology and understanding of the nature of penal substitution, all unanimously affirm the ongoing importance of the doctrine of the atonement in the construction of British evangelical identity. Thus the importance of crucicentrism and the doctrine of the atonement in the construction of British evangelical identity since the first of the eighteenth century has been found to have continued into the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The second main conclusion relating to the most recent controversy is that penal substitution continues to perform a significant intra-evangelical function as one of the primary identity markers with which to delineate between different types of British evangelicals. This has been shown to be the case in terms of both the content of the theological ideas which were contested during the course of the controversy in question and the manner in which the contestation occurred. The level of energy expended by the protagonists indicates that penal substitution is located at a significant fault line which separates and distinguishes between powerful British intra-evangelical groups. The motivations of members of the protagonist groups confirm the manner in which advocacy for, and criticism of penal substitution, function so as to delineate between the identities of these groups. Furthermore, an examination of the broad range of strategies employed by the relevant protagonists demonstrates that many of these strategies were designed to further entrench positions and strengthen this delineation.

## **Potential Future Research**

A number of potential areas for further examination have emerged during the course of the research and analysis conducted for this thesis. To begin with, it would be interesting to explore the nature of the relationship between the various notions of divine justice and punishment and societal criminal justice/penal policies. In Chapter 5 it was revealed that some critics of penal substitution (in particular Jonathan Bartley) were motivated to participate in the controversy by the desire to combat the negative effects upon criminal justice policy in civil society which they believe a notion of divine justice promoted by penal substitution can have. This is due to what such critics regard as penal substitution's focus upon retributive justice and punishment as opposed

to the more progressive notions surrounding restorative justice. This observation ranks among others which were identified in this thesis about how the way in which a religious group understands the operation of divine justice and punishment can lead to engagement with wider societal notions of criminal justice and penal policies. For instance, in Chapter 3 it was suggested that changes in European understandings of justice and the formation of penal policies during the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries may have influenced some evangelicals to question and criticise certain atonement theologies due to the emphasis such interpretations placed upon juridical notions which affirmed physical punishment. On the other hand, according to Derek Tidball, by the 1960s, reforms to civil criminal and penal legislation in Britain had also come to influence a reinterpretation of previously held assumptions about juridical perceptions of the significance of Jesus' death. At different times and in different places therefore there seems to be an intense interaction between religious and societal values, during which periods societal norms can come to shape doctrinal understanding and vice-versa. This phenomenon warrants closer scholarly attention as it sheds light on the immense societal relevance of our understandings of the atonement and how changes in secular society can also impact upon religious thought and identity.

This thesis has focused upon, and drawn a number of conclusions about, the function of the atonement and juridical atonement models, such as penal substitution, in the construction of British evangelical identity. A second area of potential further inquiry which proceeds from these findings would be to explore the reasons why sustained engagement with these theological concepts has persistently been held to have such significance to Protestant theology. This is in contrast to, for instance, Roman Catholicism or the Eastern Orthodox traditions. Further consideration could

therefore be given to the historical, theological and even political factors which have resulted in this intense engagement with questions surrounding the doctrine of the atonement and the atonement models that have developed over time.

Finally, it would be extremely worthwhile to further monitor the role of penal substitution as an intra-evangelical identity delineator. This thesis has shown that the identity-narratives put forward by religious collectives are not immutable and can indeed become the objects of intense contestation. As was noted in Chapters 4 and 5, advocates of penal substitution have sought to use a person's rejection of penal substitution as being the basis for excluding that person from being validly considered as being an evangelical. In the controversy in the mid-2000s, the leadership of the EA resisted this desire on the part of some conservative evangelicals to make penal substitution the ultimate line in the sand. Such a step could have resulted in Steve Chalke's exclusion from the EA. It should though not be discounted that the prominence of Chalke's profile within British evangelicalism itself, as well as within the broader community, coupled with the success of organisations with which he has been intimately associated, such as Oasis, also contributed to this being an undesirable move on the EA's part. It is not inconceivable however that this situation could change in the future and thus it warrants ongoing monitoring and attention. This could particularly be the case if critics of penal substitution from within British evangelicalism of the same stature as Steve Chalke do not emerge to contest this development. If this were to happen, an identity narrative which centres on the importance of penal substitution could incrementally come to achieve a somewhat hegemonic status as a dominant discourse throughout British evangelicalism (Baumann 1996: 188). This could have the effect of further enshrining a new status quo where adherence to the primacy of penal substitution, as defined at a particular moment in the history of British evangelical doctrinal contestation, becomes a uniformly accepted and

coherent evangelical truth central to evangelical identity. In this way, subscription to penal substitution could be pushed beyond the realm of views which can be legitimately questioned in evangelical circles without incurring universal charges of unorthodoxy.

Over time the strategies employed by advocates of penal substitution could therefore constrain the bounds of debate as conservative evangelicals seek to enshrine a narrative which initially started out as the ‘particular’ narrative of a certain group in a certain defined period, as a ‘universal’ narrative applicable to all British evangelical groups in all periods. Penal substitution could become the new taken-for-granted common sense in British evangelical circles. In such an instance, rather than fulfilling an intra-evangelical function, penal substitution could in effect begin to function as an external identity marker in a manner similar to that performed by the existing evangelical emphasis upon the doctrine of the atonement itself. Such a development could see penal substitution effectively becoming established as ‘the’ evangelical atonement orthodoxy for British evangelicals and dissident evangelical groups and individuals could become marginalised. In this case the ‘orthodoxy assertion’, depicted in this thesis as a tool for the contestation of a doctrinal point, would be an ‘assertion’ no longer.

## Appendix 1 – Details of Interviews Conducted

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title and Organisation</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Interview Location</b>
Jonathan Bartley	Co-Director of Ekklesia	9 July 2010	London
David Bebbington	Professor of History, Stirling University	1 October 2010	Stirling
Steve Chalke	Founder of Oasis Global	11 October 2010	By telephone in Durham & London
Jonathan Fletcher	Trustee and Council Member, Reform	16 September 2010	London
David Hilborn	Assistant Dean, St Mellitus College	20 September 2010	London
Stephen Holmes	Senior Lecturer, University of St Andrews	29 September 2010	St Andrews
Alan Mann	Freelance writer, researcher and consultant.	21 September 2010	Bristol
Stuart Murray Williams	Chair, Anabaptist Network	16 July 2010	Bristol
Mike Ovey	Principal, Oak Hill College	17 September 2010	London
Derek Tidball	Vice President, Evangelical Alliance (UK)	14 September 2010	Leicester
Tom Wright	Bishop of Durham <sup>218</sup>	18 June 2010	Bishop Auckland

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<sup>218</sup> Since the interview with Tom Wright was conducted he has ceased to be the Bishop of Durham and is currently Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St Andrews.

## **Appendix 2 – Short Biographies of Interviewees**

### **Jonathan Bartley**

Jonathan Bartley is a co-director of Ekklesia. After graduating from the London School of Economics in 1994, he worked in Parliament including for the former Prime Minister John Major. He has lectured in Theology and Politics at Sarum College, Salisbury and he has served on the Church of England Evangelical Council. He was selected to be interviewed due to the extensive coverage Ekklesia provided of the controversy among British evangelicals in the mid-2000s which is the focus of this thesis (hereafter ‘the controversy’). He also co-edited a book, *Consuming Passion: Why the Killing of Jesus Really Matters* (2005) which contains a series of essays (including one by Steve Chalke) which contributed to discussion during the period of the controversy.

### **David Bebbington**

David Bebbington is a professor of history at Stirling University and a Baptist lay preacher. After graduating from the University of Cambridge, he joined the History Department at Stirling University in 1976 and was promoted to a Personal Chair in 1999. He has been the president of the Ecclesiastical History Society and also a Distinguished Visiting Professor of History at Baylor University, Texas, USA. He was selected to be interviewed firstly because his book, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989), is widely regarded as a seminal study of the history of British evangelicalism. He has also written about aspects related to the controversy and other matters specifically relevant to important themes discussed in this thesis (Bebbington 2009a & 2010).

## **Steve Chalke**

Steve Chalke is a Baptist minister who studied theology at Spurgeon's College, London. After a brief period as a local minister, he then founded the Oasis Trust. Through Oasis and its related entities, he has been involved in a diverse range of ministry and social action initiatives. In 2003 he was appointed senior minister of Christ Church & Upton (now known as 'church.co.uk' in Waterloo, London). He was awarded an MBE in 2004 for his services to social inclusion. He was selected to be interviewed because the book, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003), which he co-authored with Alan Mann, ignited the controversy. He authored numerous subsequent publications which continued to contribute to the controversy.

## **Jonathan Fletcher**

Jonathan Fletcher is a Church of England minister and founding member, trustee and council member of the conservative Anglican evangelical organisation Reform. He ministered in churches in Cockfosters near Barnet in Greater London and Cambridge, and at St Helen's Bishopsgate in the City of London before becoming the vicar of Emmanuel Church, Wimbledon in 1982. He was selected to be interviewed on the recommendation of Rod Thomas, chairman of the Reform Council, as being the appropriate representative to speak on behalf of the Reform Council on the controversy.



## **David Hilborn**

David Hilborn was initially a minister in the United Reformed Church but became a minister in the Church of England in 2002. He has taught at Spurgeon's College, Oak Hill College and the London School of Theology. During the period 1997-2006, he was Head of Theology (initially titled Theological Advisor) at the Evangelical Alliance (UK). He then became the Director of Studies at the North Thames Ministerial Training Course which is a constituent member institution of St Mellitus College, London. He was selected to be interviewed because, in his capacity as Head of Theology, he was directly involved in the Evangelical Alliance's response to the controversy and he has subsequently written on the subject.

## **Stephen Holmes**

Stephen Holmes is a Baptist minister who studied theology at Spurgeon's College and King's College, London. He then subsequently taught at both of these institutions. In 2005 he became a lecturer and then a senior lecturer in Theology at the University of St Andrews. He has also served as a council member and the chair of the Theology and Public Policy Advisory Commission of the Evangelical Alliance (UK). He was selected to be interviewed because he presented a paper at the 2005 Atonement Symposium which was co-sponsored by the Evangelical Alliance and the London School of Theology and he has written subsequently on the controversy.

## **Alan Mann**

Alan Mann is a freelance writer, researcher and consultant in the area of Christianity and contemporary culture. He has previously worked for the Oasis Trust and is currently a member of the Associate Faculty at the Open Learning Department of the London School of Theology. He was selected to be interviewed because the book, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003), which he co-authored with Steve Chalke, ignited the controversy and he has since then authored other publications relevant to the subject.

## **Stuart Murray Williams**

Stuart Murray Williams is a trustee and chair of the Steering Group of the Anabaptist Network (UK). After completing a degree in law, he became a founding pastor of Tower Hamlets Christian Fellowship. He then undertook doctoral studies in Anabaptist history. He currently works as a trainer and consultant on emerging churches, church planting and mission. He was selected to be interviewed because he presented a paper at the 2004 Atonement Debate and also contributed to the 2005 Atonement Symposium co-convened by the Evangelical Alliance and the London School of Theology, and he has authored other publications relevant to the controversy.

## **Mike Ovey**

Mike Ovey is the principal of Oak Hill College, London. After training at Ridley Hall, Cambridge, he served as a curate at All Saints, Crowborough. He then took up a teaching position at Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia before returning to Britain to join the faculty of Oak Hill College in 1998. He was selected to be interviewed because he was involved in the 2004 Atonement Debate and has written on matters relating to the controversy.

## **Derek Tidball**

Derek Tidball is a Baptist minister and is a vice president and board member of the Evangelical Alliance (UK). He is a former Head of Mission and president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and was principal of the London School of Theology (formerly London Bible College) from 1995-2007. He is also a Visiting Scholar at Spurgeon's College, London. He was selected to be interviewed because he was the chair of the Evangelical Alliance Council during the relevant period of the controversy (2003-7). He chaired the 2004 Atonement Debate and co-chaired the 2005 Atonement Symposium co-convened by the Evangelical Alliance and the London School of Theology.

## **Tom Wright**

Tom Wright is an Anglican Bishop and New Testament scholar. At the time of the interview, he was the Bishop of Durham. He studied theology at Exeter College and Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and was a junior research fellow at Merton College, Oxford. He was then a fellow and chaplain of Downing College, Cambridge before taking up an assistant professorship at McGill University, Montreal, Canada. He returned to Britain and lectured at the University of Oxford and Worcester College before becoming Dean of Lichfield in 1994. He became Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey in 2000 and was then Bishop of Durham from 2003-10. He is currently Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St Andrews. He was selected to be interviewed because he authored a key publication, namely his essay 'The Cross and the Caricatures' (2007), during the course of the controversy.

### **Appendix 3 – Methodology for Obtaining and Analysing Research Data Concerning the Controversy During the Mid-2000s**

Research for this thesis formally began in October 2007 with the process of ascertaining and obtaining documentary sources which were available in the public domain relating to the controversy which had taken place among British evangelicals concerning penal substitution during the mid-2000s (hereafter ‘the controversy’). Research concluded in October 2010. By this point a series of targeted interviews (conducted in two phases: June-July 2010 and September-October 2010) with some of the key protagonists, representatives of protagonist organisations and commentators who had been involved in the controversy, had been conducted. The data for this thesis therefore came from two types of sources obtained during the two corresponding periods of the project.

During the initial period (October 2007 to July 2009) data was obtained from a wide range of documentary sources. Early analysis revealed that the originating document which ignited the controversy was Steve Chalke and Alan Mann’s book, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003). The research process then took the form of assembling as much documentary material as possible about *The Lost Message of Jesus*, the public debates and subsequent documents which emerged following its publication. This involved the use of appropriate research databases, such as *ATLA Religion*, and general searches of relevant Christian media, such as the *Church Times*, *Ekklesia*, *Evangelicals Now*, *Christianity Magazine* and *Christianity Today*. The various documents which were obtained and analysed in turn referred to additional published documents relevant to the controversy. These were also obtained. The range of documents analysed included: monographs, academic journal articles, essays, newspaper articles, online

reports, original texts of speeches, press releases and letters to editors of various publications. All of the documents obtained and analysed were both public and unsolicited. This had the advantage, in terms of research and ethics, of avoiding confidentiality issues (May 2001: 181).

During the process of analysing the documentary sources, the information obtained provided a basis to document and construct the basic chronology of the controversy. This in turn supplied a convenient initial framework to assist in a) presenting an overview of the controversy and b) highlighting the key publications, protagonists individuals and groups involved and c) key events. This is set out in Section 4.1. This analysis also provided a structure for the thematic organisation of the content of some of the main arguments forwarded by the protagonists during the controversy. This is documented in Section 4.2.

During the process of analysing the documentary sources relating to the controversy, the conclusion was also reached that the research for this thesis would be significantly enhanced by producing new primary research by conducting a series of interviews. These interviews would involve some of the key protagonists and commentators on the controversy. There were a number of reasons for reaching this conclusion and providing the motivations for conducting the interviews. Firstly, interviews provide the opportunity for a different level of engagement with the key protagonists, commentators and thus the issues themselves. There is also a difference between data obtained from private interviews and public documents. It was hoped that the interview data might yield responses from some of the key protagonists and commentators which were more candid in nature than would ordinarily be the situation in documents being produced for circulation in the public domain. Further, as a result of the fact that some time had now elapsed since the main events in the controversy

(the interviews were conducted during the second half of 2010, the main events took place in 2004-2007), it was hoped that the interviewees would be able to provide an element of reflection on the events and issues that was clearly not possible in the contemporaneous written documentation produced during the controversy. These events were though not in too far distant memory so as to create significant problems concerning the accuracy of recollection of the potential interviewees. Recollections could, of course, always be checked subsequently against the published contemporaneous record produced during the controversy.

Another potential issue for further research relates to the extent to which interviewees engaged in processes of reflexive identity and narrative reconstruction through the interview process and accounts. As is discussed below, interviews are by nature active and dynamic processes. In this regard, aspects of particular accounts and meanings are as much ‘created’ as they are ‘recounted’. During the interviews, the status of the interviewees as members of the British evangelical elite means that further analysis of the interview data could provide an insight into the way in which these individuals have reflexively justified and made sense of their conduct and motivations during the controversy through the medium of the interview process itself.

Conducting interviews also provided an opportunity to verify the accuracy of some of the key data provided in the contemporary documentary sources produced during the controversy. The interviews also gave the opportunity to seek to elicit information and/or opinions which were not adequately or obviously available in the documentary sources. For example, concerning the motivations of the protagonists involved in the controversy and various strategies that were employed. It eventually transpired that the data obtained from the interviews did provide some original and additional information to augment and/or better understand the initial information

provided by the documentary sources.<sup>219</sup> Crucially, this interview data also formed the basis for much of the analysis undertaken in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

A review of the data obtained from the documentary sources offered up an initial list of potential interviewees. This initial list was then organised and narrowed down to contain the most relevant individuals who represented the general protagonist positions discussed in Chapter 4. Permission to conduct the interviews was sought and obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Department of Theology and Religion of Durham University and an initial introduction and request letter was sent to 14 potential interviewees. An example of the content of the initial letter is set out in Appendix 4. Of the fourteen potential interviewees, 10 consented to be interviewed, and 1 potential interviewee (Rod Thomas of Reform) suggested an alternate potential interviewee on behalf of his organisation (Jonathan Fletcher) who was then approached and consented to be interviewed. Of the remaining potential interviewees who were approached, one declined to be interviewed and two failed to respond to the initial letter. Thus a total of 11 interviews were eventually conducted. A brief biography of the interviewees and details of the date and location of the interviews conducted are set out in Appendices 1 and 2.

With the exception of Steve Chalke who was interviewed by telephone, the remaining 10 interviews were conducted face-to-face at a time and location of each interviewee's convenience. Prior to commencing the interview, the interviewees were provided with an explanatory letter concerning the nature of the interview, their rights as interviewee and an explanation of the Consent and Acknowledgement form which

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<sup>219</sup> When discussing methodological issues for undertaking discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough (1992) notes that in the production of a corpus of samples to be analysed, 'A widely used way of enhancing a corpus is through interviews. One can interview those involved as participants in corpus samples, not only to elicit their interpretations of those samples, but also as an opportunity for the researcher to probe into issues which go beyond the sample [...]' (227).



they were requested to complete. An example of the content of this explanatory letter and the Consent and Acknowledgement Form is set out in Appendix 5. All interviewees signed the Consent and Acknowledgement Form. These have been retained with the research materials.

The interviews ranged in length from 54 minutes to just over 2 ½ hours. The length of the interview was primarily determined by the time availability of the interviewee, but the average length of interview was approximately 88 minutes. With the consent of the interviewees, all interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed to produce written interview transcripts. These interview transcripts provide the information quoted or referred to in this thesis. Two interviewees insisted upon the right to review and amend interview material as a condition of consenting to be interviewed. One of these requested that a copy of the entire interview transcript be provided. While most of the changes that he requested were stylistic, and in some instances, provided some additional factual information (for example, the location of a conference referred to in the interview), other requested amendments sought to ‘tone down’ some of the more personal criticisms that he had made about another protagonist. As a result of fact that the Consent and Acknowledgement form signed by interviewees (see Appendix 5) provides that they ‘have the right to request the Interviewer not to use any comments I make or information I provide during the course of the interview that is not already in the public domain’, this request was acceded to. However this example serves as some evidence to vindicate the decision to conduct the interviews on the basis that it was hoped that the interview data might yield responses which were more candid in nature than would ordinarily be the situation in documents being produced for circulation in the public domain. The other participant requested that a separate document be produced and provided to him containing extracts of any

direct quotations from his interview material which were to be included in this thesis.

The changes that he suggested were only stylistic in nature.

The interviews that were conducted are most accurately described as having been of a 'semi-structured' format<sup>220</sup> in that while an interview schedule in the form of a set of questions was prepared for each interview, knowledge obtained from previous documentary research about each interviewee and their contribution or commentary upon the controversy determined the questions put to them. During the course of the interviews, and in light of particular answers provided, new topics and supplementary questions not originally included on the question list were asked and interviewees were regularly asked to expand on aspects of answers they had previously provided.<sup>221</sup>

Upon reflection, one weakness of the interviews concerns the number conducted. While the interviews provided a range of opinions from some of the key players in the controversy, and also reflected opinions from each of the main protagonist positions, ideally more people from these different positions should have been interviewed to provide an even fuller account and corpus of data to be relied upon both in this thesis and in future study of the topic. This is particularly the case with respect to two categories of potential interviewees. The first category is women. None of the key protagonists in the dispute were women. There were a limited number of women who presented papers at either the public debate convened by the Evangelical Alliance in 2004 or the Atonement Symposium in 2005. Ideally, however, although

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<sup>220</sup> For a discussion of the three formats of interviews commonly referred to by social researchers – structured, semi-structured and unstructured or focused – see Charlotte Aull Davies (1999: 94-95); May (2001: 123-4); Bryman (2008: 438-439). Davies (1999) noted that 'Research based primarily on [...] semi-structured interviewing has become a very popular and important form of qualitative research across the social sciences' (95).

<sup>221</sup> It should be noted that there was never any intention in conducting the interviews to obtain resultant data that could be aggregated and observed for patterns of answers using statistical analysis of the type that answers obtained from a series of structured interviews might provide in a quantitative research project (Bryman 2008: 193; May 2001: 122; Davies 1999: 94).

limited in number, some of these people should have been interviewed to provide a non-male perspective, albeit a minority one among the British evangelical leadership. The second category is non-elites. All of the interviewees are either one or more of the following: tertiary educated; professional academics; professional religious journalists; professional freelance religious consultants; or stipendiary clergy. As stressed by some of the interviewees themselves, British evangelicals and British evangelical identity is more than the views and opinions of its professionals and leaders in its churches, academy and media. This perspective was again not represented. However this particular bias could be justified on the grounds that it was these ‘elites’ who were most influential in shaping the emerging public discourse related to the controversy.

Some final comment is appropriate concerning the issue of acknowledging my own point of view and bias towards the general subject matter at the heart of this thesis and also potentially towards the interviewees themselves. Concerning the general subject matter, my interest in penal substitutionary atonement and how this relates to evangelical identity predates the commencement of this research project. I was baptised, confirmed and spent the first 28 years of my life actively worshiping in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Australia. As mentioned during the course of this thesis, the Anglican Diocese of Sydney is (with a few notable exceptions) generally regarded as embracing and promoting a very conservative brand of Anglican evangelicalism. It was only when I commenced theological education at an Anglican theological college and secular university outside of the Diocese of Sydney that I came to realise the extent to which key aspects of my own theology up to that date (particularly with respect to soteriology and the doctrine of the atonement) had been influenced by the penal substitutionary theology I had been taught as an Anglican in Sydney. This realisation concerning the influence penal substitution has had in my own initial theological

formation within an evangelical Anglican Diocese continues to intrigue me and formed a major motivating factor for making this the subject of my research.

Concerning the interviewees, I share the same gender and also the same basic type of social, cultural, educational and professional background.<sup>222</sup> I do not consider myself to be an evangelical however and nor to my knowledge has this classification been applied to me by others. I would presently identify myself as being within the liberal catholic section of the Anglican Church. Prior to commencing undergraduate theological study, I do not recall ever describing myself as an evangelical, although my theology during this time had been significantly shaped by and reflected similar doctrinal elements associated with evangelicalism which are discussed in this thesis. This though has not prevented me from developing a growing appreciation during the course of this research of the genuine sincerity and passion with which all of the evangelicals I have encountered hold the significance of Jesus' death on the Cross as a core and foundational element of their theology and evangelical identity. However as this research has also demonstrated, such sincerity and passion is equally reflected in

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<sup>222</sup> Numerous social researchers (e.g. James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium 1995; Charlotte Aull Davies 1999) have challenged the notion of conceiving of the process by which information is obtained from interviews as being a linear process of the interviewer eliciting by their questioning pre-existing information that is conveyed through the interviewee's answers. Instead it is argued that, 'Both parties to the interview are necessarily and unavoidably *active*. Each is involved in meaning-making work. Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. Respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge – treasures of information awaiting excavation – as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers' (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 4). This understanding of interviews as having active and creative aspects necessarily brings into relevance the relative social statuses of the interviewer and interviewee. Penny Summerfield (1998) observes that for feminist scholars, particularly oral historians, 'the relationship between the interviewer and subject, is based on a critique of conventional social science for its tendency to ignore the research relationship, and particularly the subject position of the researcher, in the name of 'objective' research. The feminist argument is informed by the political aim of avoiding the reproduction of relations of domination and subordination, of colonisation and disempowerment in social research' (23-24). Charlotte Aull Davies (1999) stresses that, 'Any differences – such as those based in gender, class, age, status – which have differential access to power in the wider society will affect interaction during the interview; in particular, such differences tend to undermine what is sometimes regarded as a fundamental distinction of research interviews (as opposed to other types of interviews), namely, the presumption of equality of the participants within the context of the interview itself' (99). However, Davies proceeds to acknowledge that 'At the same time, it is important to recognize that shared social statuses do not guarantee understanding or make possible a presumption of equality and associated openness in responses' (100).

the variety of opposing views as to the legitimate place of a penal substitutionary account in interpreting this core element of their identities.

## Appendix 4 – Example of the Initial Interview Request Letter

*[On the Letterhead of the Department of Theology and Religion, Durham]*

*[Insert Date]* 2010

*[Insert Name and Address]*

Dear *[Insert Name]*,

My name is Max Wood. I am an Anglican minister from Australia currently undertaking PhD Research at Durham University under the supervision of Professor Gerard Loughlin and Dr Mathew Guest. My research is focused upon the way in which recent controversies that have arisen concerning penal substitutionary atonement suggest that penal substitution continues to function as an important identity marker for Evangelical Christians in Britain.

*[Insert details of their involvement in the controversy and/or relevant publications – For example, in the letter sent to Mike Ovey, the wording used here was as follows:]*  
As a participant in the public debate (October 2004) and atonement symposium (July 2005) convened by the Evangelical Alliance, UK in response to the debate arising from the publication of Steve Chalke and Alan Mann's book *The Lost Message of Jesus* (2003), and in light of your publications including: *Pierced For Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (2007) and 'The Lost Message of Jesus: Have we lost the message of Jesus?' (2004), I would be very eager to meet with you for the purposes of an interview in order to explore your views on this issue, especially in its broader contemporary context.

Ideally it would be preferable if we could meet for a face-to-face interview. I am currently based in Durham, however, I would be very happy to travel to meet with you at a location of your convenience. If a face-to-face interview is not possible, then a telephone interview could be an alternative. I am proposing to conduct interviews during two periods: 28 June 2010 to 17 July 2010 and then 13 September 2010 to 2 October 2010. My contact details are as follows:

**The Reverend Maxwell Wood**

*[Insert details of Address,  
Phone Number,  
Email]*

I look forward to hearing from you regarding the possibility of us meeting. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions relating to the proposed interview or my research generally.

Yours faithfully,

**The Reverend Maxwell Wood,**  
PhD Candidate, Durham University.

## Appendix 5 – Example of the Explanatory Letter and the Consent and Acknowledgement Form

*[On the Letterhead of the Department of Theology and Religion, Durham]*

*[Insert Date]* 2010

*[Insert Name and Address]*

Dear *[Insert Name]*,

Thank-you very much for your willingness to meet with me for the purposes of an interview.

As you would appreciate, there are a number of procedural formalities that are required with respect to the conduct of research interviews. In particular, the University of Durham Theology and Religion Departmental Ethics Committee which has approved the proposed interview requires interviewees to complete the **enclosed** Consent and Acknowledgment form. As you will see from the form, it requires you to state that:

- I have provided you with the necessary information regarding the purpose of the proposed interview;
- I have provided you with the opportunity to ask any questions you might have regarding the proposed interview and that I have provided you with satisfactory answers to your questions (if any);
- that you consent to be interviewed by me;
- that I have informed you that I propose to make an audio recording of the interview and that you understand and consent to this;
- that I have informed you that if you consent to me making an audio recording of our interview I intend to retain a copy of this audio recording with my other research materials after the completion of my research and that you consent to this;
- that you have the right to request me not to use any comments you make or information you provide during the course of the interview that is not already in the public domain; and,

that you understand that you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time without having to give a reason for withdrawing.

Obviously you may have some questions in relation to the matters set out above, please do not hesitate to advise me if this is the case. However if you are satisfied with the matters that are set out in the enclosed Consent and Acknowledgment form would you please complete and sign the form and return it to me at our meeting

Yours faithfully,

**The Reverend Maxwell Wood,**  
PhD Candidate, Durham University.

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

INTERVIEWEE CONSENT AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT FORM

Name of Proposed Interviewee: [*Insert Name*] (“The Interviewee”)

Name of Proposed Interviewer: **Maxwell Wood** (“The Interviewer”)

The Interviewee consents and acknowledges the following:

1. The Interviewer has provided me with necessary information regarding the purpose of the proposed interview.
2. The Interviewer has provided me with the opportunity to ask any questions I have had to date regarding the proposed interview and has provided me with satisfactory answers to my questions (if any).
3. I consent to be interviewed by the Interviewer.
4. I understand that the Interviewer proposes to make an audio recording of the interview.
5. I understand that the Interviewer intends to retain a copy of the audio recording of the interview with his other research materials after the completion of his research.
6. I understand that I have the right to request the Interviewer not to use any comments I make or information I provide during the course of the interview that is not already in the public domain.
7. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the interview at any time without having to give a reason for withdrawing.

Signed..... Date.....  
[*Insert Name*]



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